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IRREGULAR WARFARE STUDIES

NUMBER 1



CENTER ON
IRREGULAR WARFARE
AND ARMED GROUPS



THE AL-QAEDA ACCELERANT
IN BOKO HARAM'S RISE

Jacob Zenn

U. S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

The Al-Qaeda Accelerant in
Boko Haram's Rise

IRREGULAR WARFARE STUDIES

In 2008, the U.S. Naval War College established the Center on Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups (CIWAG). The center's primary mission is to bring together operators, practitioners, and scholars to share academic expertise and knowledge about and operational experience in violent and nonviolent irregular warfare challenges, and to make this important research available to a wider community of interest. Our intent is also to include use of these materials within joint professional military educational (JPME) curricula to fulfill the needs of military practitioners preparing to meet the challenges of the post-9/11 world. CIWAG's two series of case study publications are part of the center's expansive, ongoing program of workshops, symposia, lectures, research, and writing.

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CENTER ON IRREGULAR WARFARE AND ARMED GROUPS



U. S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
686 Cushing Road
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The Al-Qaeda Accelerant in Boko Haram's Rise

by Jacob Zenn



CENTER ON IRREGULAR WARFARE AND ARMED GROUPS



U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

CENTER ON IRREGULAR WARFARE
AND ARMED GROUPS (CIWAG)

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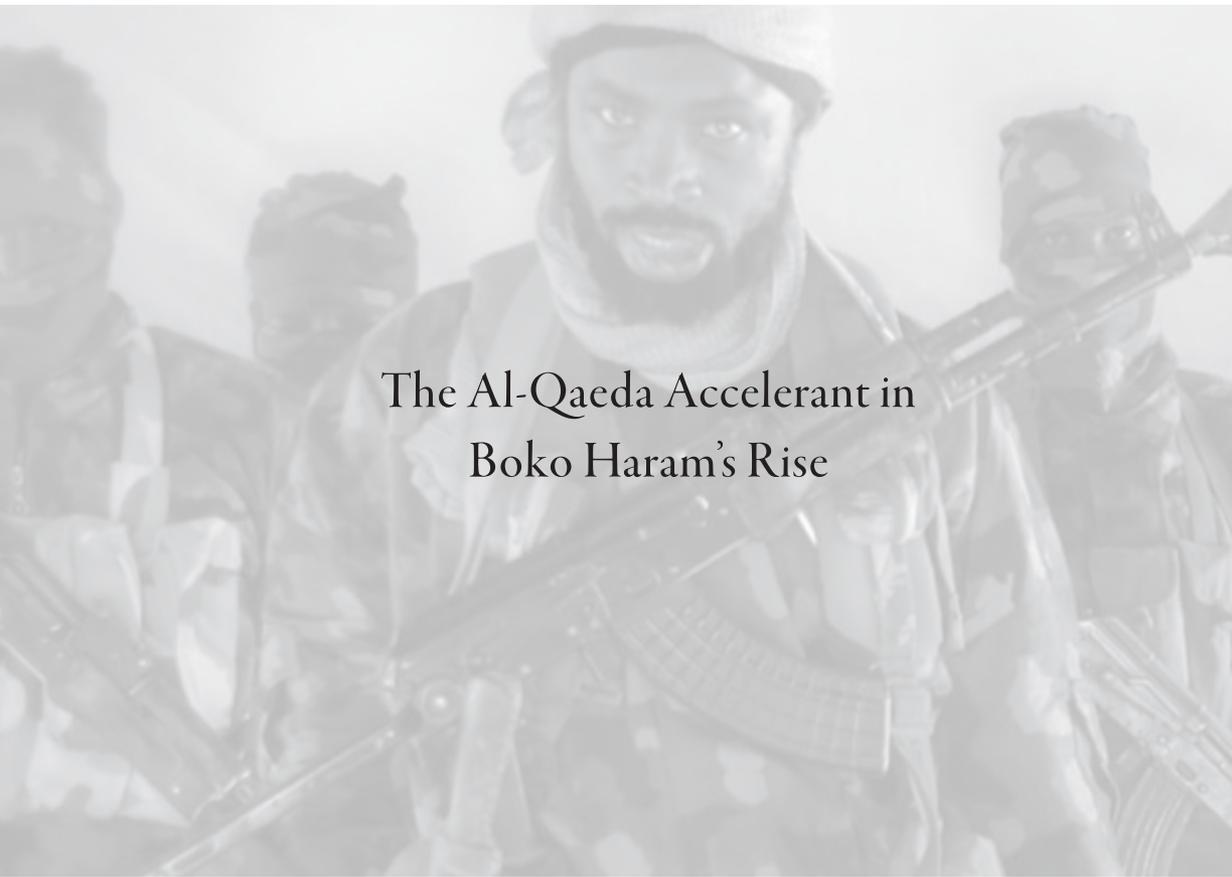
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The Al-Qaeda Accelerant in
Boko Haram's Rise

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

The group known as Boko Haram made international headlines in 2014 with its audacious kidnapping raid on a girls' school in Chibok, Nigeria. The Twitter hashtag #bringbackourgirls transformed the news into a social media meme, and Boko Haram ("Western education is forbidden") briefly became a household name. But the group had existed long before its brush with social media infamy; and long after news of the Chibok girls disappeared from the headlines, the group continues to plague northern Nigeria and the Chad Lake basin countries. So who are the members of Boko Haram? What are their goals? How have they persisted?

Jacob Zenn's case study, the Al-Qaeda Accelerant in Boko Haram's Rise, starts by challenging the very name Boko Haram. The case maps the group's many factions, loyalties, splinterings, and re-formations, while accompanying diagrams help track this evolution. Readers expecting a quick gloss of names, dates, and places may need to take a deep breath; the splintering is complex, creates complicated layers of overlapping rivalries, and defies straightforward organizational charts. But as the story unfolds of how and why JAS has evolved from Boko Haram, Zenn supplies deep insight into the seams and gaps that exist, and explains how strategic and tactical motivations have propelled an armed group to regional importance.

This close analysis has further significance. Zenn dissects how the evolution of JAS has taken place under the watchful eye, and often the directing hands, of both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham. The

case, drawn extensively from primary-source materials, shines a spotlight on these groups' different strategies for recruiting and managing JAS as a subordinate local group and highlights JAS's starring role in a new international rivalry: the uncivil war between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. This study is up to date as of its release in the summer of 2017.



Andrea Dew
CIWAG, Co-Director



David A. Brown
CIWAG, Co-Director

INTRODUCTION

The Chibok Kidnapping



A still image from a May 2014 Boko Haram video of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls being held captive.

“We’re here to protect you, Boko Haram is coming and you need to evacuate.”

More than 250 schoolgirls at the Government Secondary School in Chibok, Nigeria immediately woke up from their beds on the night of April 14, 2014 and saw soldiers dressed in green military fatigues surrounding their dormitory. They knew the group commonly called Boko Haram operated in the area and—only weeks before—had attacked Chibok itself, causing their school to be shut down for safety reasons. School had reopened for this one day so national exams could be held.

Leaving their dormitory with the soldiers meant the girls would miss their once-in-a-year opportunity to take the exam. But safety was more important than any girl’s worst nightmare: a Boko Haram commander in the

mountains near Chibok was notorious for kidnapping girls, forcing them to be porters and cooks, and ordering them to behead captives.¹ Not only would Boko Haram exploit any female captive, but would the villagers in Chibok welcome back a “Boko Haram girl” if she ever became free again? Once “married” to a Boko Haram member? Perhaps even the mother of a “Boko Haram child”?

The soldiers were in a convoy of pickup trucks with official Nigerian army insignias. Group by group they filtered the girls into the back of each truck until the trucks were filled to capacity. Within an hour all of the girls were piled in and ready to go.

But some of the girls noticed something odd. Why were the soldiers stealing the school’s gasoline, cooking supplies, and pens and paper? Once the convoy left for the bush, the girls were wondering where they were headed. The soldiers told them not to say a word, or else Boko Haram would hear them. So the girls whispered among themselves. They told each other they weren’t going toward Chibok. They were heading south, toward Sambisa Forest—the known base of Boko Haram’s leadership.

When the convoy came to a stop after a few hours, several dozen girls made a run for it. They didn’t know where they were or who they were with, but they didn’t trust these soldiers. Even soldiers were known to be abusive. Before the girls escaped into the bush, they took one last look at the convoy in the distance. Little did they know that they would never see many of their classmates again. For the “soldiers” were not soldiers: they were members of Boko Haram.²

When news of the kidnapping made it to Nigeria’s federal government, the government first denied a kidnapping took place; but upon receiving evidence, the country’s leaders admitted there was a kidnapping but claimed that most of the girls had been rescued.³ Then the government then said only 100 girls were taken. Finally, after several days, the government could no longer refute the parents’ evidence that more than 250 of their daughters were missing.⁴ Nonetheless, the rest of the world did not pay attention: the news cycles were still focused on the mysterious disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 the previous month, and Boko Haram had carried out dozens of similar, albeit smaller-scale, kidnappings of women that had also been ignored.⁵

But nearly one month after the kidnapping, the world finally took notice when Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau appeared in a split-screen video with 100 of the girls at a hideout in Sambisa Forest and said, “I will sell your girls in the market. It is Allah that instructed me to sell them. I will sell them until we soak the ground of Nigeria with Christian blood and so-called Muslims contradicting Islam.”⁶

No jihadist group—or any militant group in recent memory—had ever so blatantly promoted slavery in this way; al-Qaeda never even took up the issue of slavery in its theological reasoning for conducting jihad against the West and the “Crusaders.” Once the media picked up on Shekau’s speech, the Chibok kidnapping became the world’s top news item, and a viral global hashtag campaign and corresponding Nigeria-based protest movement, #Bringbackourgirls, was formed to demand that the Nigerian government rescue them. Shekau, however, became notorious in the months after the kidnapping for taunting the Nigerian government and the girls’ families. For example, he went on video on the three-month anniversary of the kidnapping and chanted, “Bring back our army! Bring back our army, hahahaha!” in reference to Boko Haram’s pilfering tanks from the Nigerian army—and, of course, playing on the words of the hashtag campaign.⁷

Despite claiming numerous times over the next three years that Boko Haram would soon be defeated, on April 14, 2017, the three-year anniversary of the kidnapping, only two other girls had escaped custody.⁸ Nonetheless, Boko Haram managed to negotiate for the release of 23 Chibok girls in October 2016 and 82 more Chibok girls in May 2017 in return for Boko Haram prisoners and reportedly undisclosed sums of money. This showed that there was still some hope of recovering most, if not all, of the kidnapped girls. On the other hand, that Boko Haram help captive so many girls for so long with all of the freed girls apparently well fed and medically fit showed that the Boko Haram’s control of territory and supply lines were more intact than the government had portrayed.

AQIM’s Response

Watching Shekau’s bravado in claiming the Chibok kidnapping, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) — which was originally called the Salafist

Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)—could only look on with reservation. Ever since becoming a formal al-Qaeda affiliate in 2007, AQIM had concentrated its efforts on expanding southwards into sub-Saharan West Africa—and Nigeria was a goldmine.⁹ AQIM was founded by Arab Algerians as one of the anti-government insurgent groups in the Algerian civil war in 1990s, but by the mid-2000s Algerian security forces had eliminated many of the insurgents or reconciled with them in an amnesty program. The most violent insurgent faction, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), lost popular support after it declared *takfir* (an Arabic-Islamic term for “apostasy,” which, according to jihadists, warrants the death penalty) on the entire Algerian population that did not join the GIA. Thus, by 2007, AQIM was the one insurgent faction that had outlasted all others.

AQIM’s shift south to the trans-Sahel countries of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and later Nigeria was induced by the Algerian military strategy of accepting a status quo with AQIM: AQIM would operate mostly outside of Algeria, and the military would generally not frustrate its activities as long as they were not in Algeria. AQIM, meanwhile, thrived in the Sahel, where it kidnapped foreign tourists and engineers for large ransoms from tourist and mining sites dotting the region.¹⁰ AQIM members also learned to use GPS systems to store arms, set up training camps in desert hideouts, and embedded themselves in the Sahel by marrying into and recruiting among the West African tribes and clans and developing narratives tailored to the West African context. (Focusing on the reconquest of Spain, or Andalusia, for example, had much less resonance to West Africans than it did to Algerians, while focusing on a historical figure like Usman dan Fodio¹¹ appealed more to West Africans, especially Nigerians.) AQIM’s expansion in the Sahel reached an apex in April 2012 when it took over northern Mali alongside its mostly Tuareg ally, Ansar Dine,¹² and Movement for Unity [Monotheism] and jihad in West Africa (MUJWA)¹³, comprised of fighters from various West African ethnic groups in Mali and neighboring countries. A French-led intervention code-named Operational Serval, however, finally ousted those groups from northern Mali in early 2013. AQIM nonetheless continued to carry out major attacks over the ensuing years in northern Mali and, occasionally, neighboring countries and by 2017 it had formalized a new and increasingly active insurgent coalition of groups in northern Mali.

Despite AQIM's push south, it could no longer justify its relationship with Boko Haram in Nigeria after 2014, with Shekau reviving "slavery" and carrying out attacks resulting in mass Muslim civilian casualties. Ever since al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) went on a spree of killing Shias in grisly fashion in Iraq in the mid-2000s, al-Qaeda was trying show Muslim masses around the world that it was more "humane" than depicted by the "Crusader" media. Although slavery of Christians (almost all of the girls in Chibok were Christian) may have had some theological resonance for hard-line Salafi jihadis, and some al-Qaeda members thought the kidnapping was justifiable if the girls were exchanged for Boko Haram prisoners, this tactic—and Shekau's audacious boasting of it—was not the way for al-Qaeda to win "hearts and minds."

Islamic State's Response

At the time of the Chibok kidnapping, Islamic State was just three months away from Abubakar al-Baghdadi's July 2014 declaration of a caliphate. Islamic State was in need of "provinces" around the world that would show its global reach. Moreover, unlike al-Qaeda, Islamic State thrived on gaining attention through unprecedented acts of terror and brutality that it posted on social media for the world to see: immolation of captives, burying victims alive, and drowning enemies in acid. These and other actions carried al-Zarqawi's legacy that al-Qaeda had rejected for image reasons (not necessarily out of principle). The "Revival of Slavery"—as Islamic State would title an edition in its premiere magazine, *Dabiq*—praised the Chibok kidnapping, and other Islamic State statements showed that Boko Haram set a precedent for it to take up the tactic of kidnapping Yazidi women in Iraq and Syria later that year.¹⁴ After the Chibok kidnapping, Islamic State knew it wanted Boko Haram to become its "West Africa Province" and Shekau to be the *wali*, or governor.

How did Boko Haram become part of the chess match between al-Qaeda and Islamic State at the international level? And at the local level, how did Boko Haram develop the capability to kidnap more than 250 girls in one night, have a propaganda campaign that captivated the world's attention, and keep all but two of the girls from escaping for more than three years, while still maintaining the patience, leadership hierarchy and organization

to concluded negotiations for the release of 23 and 83 girls in October 2016 and May 2017? Only one decade before the Chibok kidnapping, in 2004, Boko Haram was an upstart but struggling group. Yet, by 2014 it had risen to the highest levels of international notoriety, and in 2015 it was ranked the world's most deadly terrorist group.¹⁵

This case study answers these questions—but, first, it is important to understand that Boko Haram is not what you think it is. In fact, *there is no group called Boko Haram*. Boko Haram has never existed.

Does this mean all of the violence in Nigeria has been a figment of the world's imagination and that the Chibok kidnapping is merely a conspiracy?¹⁶ Of course not.

Boko Haram did not carry out the Chibok kidnapping *because the group's name is not really Boko Haram*. Indeed, using the name “Boko Haram” can be highly misleading in terms of understanding its origins, evolutions, and capabilities. Why?

In fact, four groups make up what is commonly known as Boko Haram: the Nigerian Taliban, JAS, Ansaru, and the West Africa Province:

Nigerian Taliban existed from the 1990s until 2009 and was the predecessor of JAS before Shekau announced its formation in 2010.

JAS 1.0 and 2.0 (full name: Jama'atu Ahlisunnah Lida'awati Wal-Jihad) existed from 2010 to March 2015 in its first iteration, which until 2014 included a Shekau faction and an AQIM faction. This can be called JAS 1.0. In August 2016, it formed again under the same name. This can be called JAS 2.0. Both iterations have been under Shekau's leadership.

Ansaru (full name: Jama'atul Ansaru Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan) was known as al-Qaeda in the Lands Beyond the Sahel in 2011 but changed its name to Ansaru in 2012 and has existed from 2012 to the present, although it has been operationally dormant since 2013. Its leader, Khalid al-Barnawi, was arrested in April 2016, leaving the group leaderless. Ansaru is affiliated with al-Qaeda.

West Africa Province has existed from March 2015 to the present. It was under Shekau's leadership with a Shekau faction and an Abu Musab al-Barnawi faction (no familial relation to Khalid al-Barnawi) from March 2015 to August 2016; since August 2016, it has been under Abu Musab al-Barnawi's leadership. West Africa Province is affiliated with Islamic State (IS).

So who carried out the Chibok kidnapping?

The answer is, of course, JAS 1.0. West Africa Province did not exist in April 2014, and Ansaru was operationally dormant by then. If Ansaru had been responsible, it would likely have claimed the kidnapping and the kidnapping would have been attributed to "Ansaru" by the media, not "Boko Haram". But the "bonus answer" is JAS 1.5, including elements of its former AQIM faction and former Ansaru members who reintegrated with JAS at the time of the kidnapping.

Complicated? Yes. But this complexity and factionalization has become all too common in the dynamic contest between al-Qaeda and IS for the affiliation of salafist groups around the world. Moreover, mastering these complex dynamics is the first step to understanding the ever evolving front lines in their competition and to understanding the role local groups with outsized ambitions play in expanding salafist movements.

A Note on Names and History

Nigerian Taliban, JAS 1.0 and 2.0, Ansaru, and West Africa Province

From the early 1990s, when Osama bin Laden first "invested" in a jihadi movement in Nigeria, until 2009, the group now commonly referred to as Boko Haram was most often called the "Nigerian Taliban" (or "Yobe Taliban," in reference to the Nigerian state where it was most active).¹⁷ The Nigerian Taliban's first leader, Muhammed Ali, and his followers sought to emulate the governance and society of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Nigerians who encountered the Nigerian Taliban after Muhammed Ali's death in 2004, however, increasingly became familiar with one aspect of the core ideology of his successor, Muhammed Yusuf. Yusuf was best known for his belief that *boko*¹⁸ (Western education or, literally, books) was *haram*

(blasphemous).¹⁹ Hence people in northern Nigeria called the group “Boko Haram,” a name which the media, politicians, and later the world at large adopted that translates to “Western education is blasphemous.”

Nigerian security forces nearly wiped out the Nigerian Taliban in 2009, but it resurfaced in 2010 under Abubakar Shekau’s leadership. Shekau renamed the group Jama’atu Ahlisunnah Lida’awati Wal-Jihad (for lack of a better acronym, “JAS” is used in this case study). This name, which in Arabic literally means the “[Sunni Muslim] Group for Preaching and Jihad,” implied that the days of preaching were over and the movement would move to the phase of jihad.

Muhammed Yusuf’s son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi,²⁰ who would later become a leader in West Africa Province, acknowledged the name was too long and an acronym for it so unsuitable that people still called the group Boko Haram, even though JAS considered the name to be a slander.²¹ And on no few occasions Shekau threatened that anyone who called the group Boko Haram would be killed. According to Shekau, JAS was about much more than *boko* being *haram*; it was also about “Western education [being] part of a broader civilizational project to detach Muslims from Islam and its Arabic language traditions, and instead immerse Muslims in Christianity and English language.”²²

To add to this complexity, in 2011, a group emerged called al-Qaeda in the Lands Beyond the Sahel (AQLBS), which changed its name to Jama’atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (“Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa”), or Ansaru, in 2012, in part to disguise its affiliation to al-Qaeda.²³ This was comprised of Nigerian AQIM members who were so dissatisfied with Shekau’s killings of Muslims that they formed their own group. This group is called Ansaru in this case study.

Not to be outdone, another faction emerged *within* JAS—as opposed to outside of JAS’s organizational structure like Ansaru—that was comprised of AQIM-trained Nigerian militants who disagreed with Shekau’s killing of Muslims but who remained part of JAS and tolerated Shekau’s authority as leader. This faction is called the JAS AQIM faction in this case study. The faction within JAS that was both loyal to and supportive of Shekau is called the JAS Shekau faction in this case study.

Beginning in 2013, Ansaru and the JAS AQIM faction began to weaken for reasons discussed below, and many of their members rejoined the JAS Shekau faction, unifying again briefly under the umbrella of JAS (JAS 1.5). However, by 2015, JAS 1.5 pledged its allegiance to the newly powerful IS and became Islamic State's West Africa Province. The state of play at this point became typically splintered and complicated: the group formerly known as JAS ceased to exist; Ansaru existed, albeit in operational dormancy; and West Africa Province carried the legacy of JAS, the JAS AQIM faction, and many Ansaru members who left Ansaru to join JAS 1.5 and then West Africa Province.

Within months, however, West Africa Province became factionalized into the Abu Musab al-Barnawi faction, referring to Muhammed Yusuf's son who led that faction, and the Shekau faction, referring to the Shekau loyalists in West Africa Province. And by 2016, the Abu Musab al-Barnawi faction had deposed Shekau in an internal coup supported by ISIS. The underlying rivalry was exposed when the Shekau faction continued to kill Muslim civilians and in defiance of orders from ISIS to Muslim who Shekau considered to be apostates as "slaves." ISIS acknowledged the coup and recognized Abu Musab al-Barnawi as the West Africa Province *wali*, and the ousted Shekau faction regrouped and resurrected JAS 2.0.

As of this writing in 2017, therefore, the main groups are West Africa Province, which is led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi; JAS 2.0, which is led by Shekau; and Ansaru, which is recognized by al-Qaeda, although it is operationally dormant and has no known active leader. Nonetheless, "Boko Haram" continues to be used to refer to West Africa Province and JAS, although not Ansaru: thus, if either West Africa Province or JAS were to carry out a major attack, it would currently be reported as a Boko Haram attack, while when Ansaru carried out attacks they were attributed to Ansaru.

Now that this name game has shed light on the history of the various groups and factions known as Boko Haram, it is important to review the hand that al-Qaeda was dealt in Nigeria, as this allowed al-Qaeda to accelerate the rise of the Nigerian Taliban and its successor groups. The following section will explore the origins of the Nigerian Taliban.

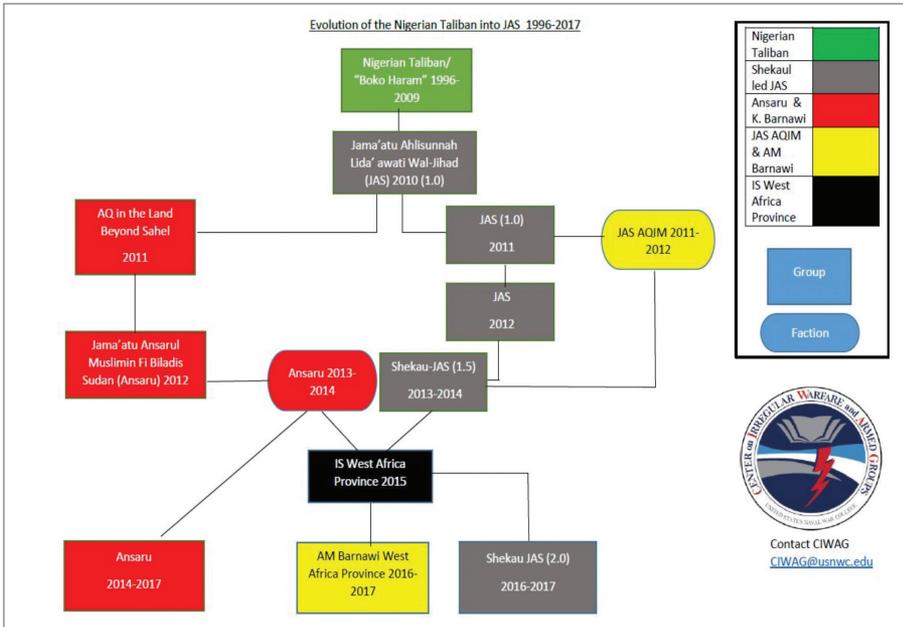


Figure 1.1. Evolution of the Nigerian Taliban to JAS 1996-2017

Al-Qaeda's Hand in Nigeria

In the mid-1990s, Osama bin Laden was living in Sudan. He had left the jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s for his native Saudi Arabia, but was exiled from Saudi Arabia to Sudan because of his criticism of Saudi Arabia's hosting U.S. troops on its soil to oust Saddam Hussain's Iraqi army from Kuwait in the first Persian Gulf War instead of using Afghanistan *mujahideen* veterans. Bin Laden's plan to fight the U.S., which he considered Islam's number one enemy after the fall of the Soviet Union, involved a classic terrorist tactic: provoke the U.S. into engaging in a costly, unending, overseas military campaign against an enemy (al-Qaeda) that could not be eliminated and that was highly motivated (inspired by faith in Allah). He thus trained a group of fighters in Sudan who were loosely connected to the Battle of Mogadishu in 1992. Under diplomatic pressure from the U.S., bin Laden was again exiled from Sudan in 1996 and returned to Afghanistan, while the networks he left behind continued on without him. His fighters were directly involved in the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1998, which killed 200 people, as well as the bombing of the USS *Cole* off the coast of Yemen in 2000.²⁴

Except for the retaliatory bombing of the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Sudan in 1998, which was believed to be a weapons manufacturing hub, the U.S. did not respond in the way he wanted.

Bin Laden's networks of fighters included Nigerians he met in Sudan. Although Nigeria was on the other side of the continent from Sudan and far from Afghanistan, it featured in Bin Laden's overall strategy for several reasons:

Overextending the enemy. According to Abubakr Naji's *Management of Savagery*,²⁵ adding Nigeria as jihadist front would allow al-Qaeda to perform "retaliatory action" against the "enemy" in Nigeria if it "perpetrated a hostile act against a region in the Arabian Peninsula or Iraq." Not only would this "confuse the enemy ... if the region where the retaliatory action occurs is governed by an infidel regime," such as Nigeria, but it would also send a "practical message to Muslims everywhere that we are one nation and that our duty is not hindered by political borders."

Economic warfare. Naji also argued that kidnapping an engineer in Nigeria's oil sector (or a journalist or Christian) could serve the purpose of making a demand on the Nigerian government to stop selling oil to the U.S as part of economic warfare.²⁶ Destabilizing Nigeria, more generally, would hurt the Western economies that benefit from Nigeria's oil production, which was part of an evolving al-Qaeda "economic warfare" strategy that bin Laden had developed to target the global energy industry. In 2003 bin Laden for the first time listed Nigeria as a country that was "ready for liberation," along with Pakistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco.²⁷

Global narratives. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with about 80 million Muslims (predominantly in the north) and 80 million Christians (predominantly in the south). The two religious groups have a history of clashing over land use, including in recent decades between Muslim Fulani herders who have been forced southwards to seek fertile pastures and the predominantly Christian tribes who are indigenous to the area known as the Middle Belt.²⁸ These clashes often rise to the level of being perceived as battles between Islam and Christianity and may explain why polls have consistently shown that Nigerian Muslims have among the most favorable views of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Islamic State, and suicide bombings of any demographic in the world (although such support significantly decreased in proportion to the increase in JAS-related violence in the country since 2012).²⁹ Avenging

Muslim deaths in Nigeria would thus fit well in the narrative bin Laden was trying to create of Muslims fighting the “Crusaders.”

But there were also domestic conditions—beyond the fault line in the Middle Belt—that provided the Nigerian Taliban with a fertile environment to grow.

According one perspective, the Nigerian Taliban emerged in a fertile terrain for an ideology like al-Qaeda’s to take root. After 1979, Persian Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar poured hundreds of millions of dollars into Nigeria to offset Shia (and Sufi) influence in the country through the promotion of Salafism. Iran’s Islamic Revolution stirred up hopes among some northern Nigerian Muslims that they, too, could create an Islamic government in Nigeria, while some Nigerian Sunni Muslim groups shifted towards Shiism. Although the Gulf countries successfully inculcated Salafism in northern Nigeria and the Salafi Izala³⁰ movement became Nigeria’s largest Muslim movement by the 1990s, various break-off groups of Izala started leaning towards doctrines of *takfirism*,³¹ opposition to Western education, and jihadism. These breakoff groups evolved into what would become the Nigerian Taliban, which would link financially and operationally with al-Qaeda even as leaders of the “mainstream” Izala movement shied away from such a relationship.

According to another perspective, the emergence of the Nigerian Taliban has a local, not transnational, focus. In this view, the Nigerian Taliban specifically rose in Borno State and Yobe State because those two states were suffering from desertification and a shrinking Lake Chad. The northern Nigerian background of poverty and illiteracy also added to the deprivation that allowed the Nigerian Taliban to gain a foothold.

In yet another perspective, historical, socioeconomic, and political factors are responsible for the emergence of the Nigerian Taliban and successor organizations.

While northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim (despite the migration of southern Nigerian Christians to the region throughout several generations), Borno and Yobe are distinct from the rest of northern Nigeria. These two states are the homelands of Nigeria’s Kanuri population, who although almost all Muslims, are distinct linguistically, culturally, and historically from the Muslim Hausa-Fulani³² of the rest of northern Nigeria. The

Kanuris have arguably gotten a raw deal in post-colonial Nigeria compared to the Hausa-Fulanis.

The Kanuris led successions of one of Africa's most powerful caliphates around Lake Chad for nearly 1,000 years until its dissolution in the late 1800s at the hands of English, French, and German colonial armies and local allies as well as the Kanuris' other rivals, such as the Hausa-Fulanis, whose leaders waged jihad against the caliphate in the early 1800s.³³ The former Kanem-Borno territories have since been divided among Borno and Yobe in Nigeria, southeastern Niger, parts of Chad, and northern Cameroon—a state of affairs which Muhammed Yusuf lamented in his sermons—while the Hausa-Fulanis in northern Nigeria and Christians in southern Nigeria are the dominant linguistic, religious, and political groups in their respective regions.³⁴

One of the supporting pieces of evidence for the origins of the Nigerian Taliban being tied to Kanuri marginalization is that JAS's area of operations (AO) since 2010 has almost perfectly matched the boundaries of the Kanuri homelands of northeastern Nigeria and neighboring countries. Ansaru and the JAS AQIM network, in contrast, operated throughout northern Nigeria and, perhaps not coincidentally, focused their narratives on historical and regional themes relevant especially to Hausa-Fulanis. The leadership cadre of JAS is almost exclusively Kanuri, with Kanuri language most commonly used among fighters.

The case study so far has provided context on the kidnapping in Chibok that placed JAS in the international spotlight and set it on a trajectory to join Islamic State and leave al-Qaeda's orbit; the importance of distinguishing between various names and internal factions that have comprised the groups commonly known as Boko Haram and Ansaru; and the al-Qaeda strategy for targeting Nigeria as well as perspectives on why Nigeria offered a fertile ground for al-Qaeda infiltration.

If these were the cards al-Qaeda had to play with in Nigeria, did it make the right wager? If so, which were the correct strategic moves al-Qaeda made? If not, which errors did al-Qaeda make, and were such errors foreseeable? These are questions to track throughout this case study.

Notes

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8. World Watch Monitor, "Another Chibok Schoolgirl Escapes With Baby," November 7, 2016, available at: <https://www.worldwatch-monitor.org/2016/11/update-another-chibok-schoolgirl-escapes-with-baby/>.
9. Jean-Luc Marret "Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb: A 'Global' Organization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2008) 31:6, p. 543; Stephen Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The Evolution of an Algerian Islamist Terrorist Group Into an al-Qa'ida Affiliate and Its Implications for the Sahara-Sahel Region" *Concerned African Scholars*, Bulletin No. 85, Spring 2010.
10. See, for example, Alex Thurston, "AQIM Kidnappings and Murders in the Sahel, 2007-Present," *Sahelblog*, January 18, 2011, available at: <https://sahelblog.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/aqim-kidnappings-and-murders-in-the-sahel-2007-present/>.
11. During the early 1800s, Usman dan Fodio, a Fulani, led a revolt against the Hausa kingdoms in what is now southern Niger, northern Nigeria, and northern Cameroon and subsequently established an Islamic caliphate based in Sokoto. Dan Fodio believed the rulers of the Hausa states were mixing Islam with aspects of traditional religions, which is a practice he wanted to eliminate. His heirs still are traditional religious rulers in northern Nigeria, but JAS now accuses them of being the same as the Hausa states of the 1800s, by mixing Islamic with democracy and secularism.
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- facilitated the union between JAS and Islamic State, also cited the kidnapping of the Chibok girls as the event that strengthened his belief that JAS is indeed a “genuine” jihadi group based on the “group’s revival of the Sunna of taking unbelievers as captives.”
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 17. Some members also referred to the group as Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamma.
 18. *Boko* can refer to “book” or, more broadly, “Western education,” in northern Nigeria’s lingua franca of Hausa.
 19. *Haram* is an Arabic term also used in Hausa meaning “blasphemous.”
 20. Al-Barnawi means “The Bornoan,” referring to Borno State.
 21. Al-Naba, Issue 41, available at: <http://jihadology.net/2016/08/02/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-41/>.
 22. “Mallam Abūbākr Shekau,” by Abūbākr Shekau, February 16, 2009. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQY4GLtzLdU>.
 23. See Cole Bunzel, “Diluting Jihad: Tahrir al-Sham and the Concerns of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi,” *jihadica*, March 29, 2017, available at: <http://www.jihadica.com/diluting-jihad/>; Aaron Y. Zelin, “What’s in a Name: The Death of the al-Qa’ida Brand?” *al-Wasat*, August 8, 2011, available at: <https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2011/08/08/whats-in-a-name-the-death-of-the-al-qa-ida-brand/>; Jason Burke, “Bin Laden Wanted to Change al-Qaida’s Bloodied Name,” *The Guardian*, June 24, 2011, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/24/bin-laden-documents-alqaida-struggle>.
 24. Hunting Bin Laden: FBI Executive Summary, pbs.org, November 18, 1998, available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/bombings/summary.html>; Diana Elias, “Video Offers Strong Bin Laden-USS Cole Link,” *abcnews.com*, June 19, 2001; <https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>.
 25. In 2004, a new member in a jihadist online forum posted a link to a new book, *Management* [also translated as “Administration”] of *Savagery - The Most Crucial Period to Be Faced by the Nation*, by Abubakr Naji. The 113-page book was published by the al-Qa’ida-affiliated Center for Islamic Studies and Research. In the book, Naji presented an elaborate plan for the re-creation of an Islamic state, starting in limited areas and spreading worldwide. Naji was also a regular contributor to the al-Qa’ida-affiliated online magazine, *Sawt al-Jihad*, which was published by AQAP. The book has been widely cited by jihadists since its publication. It is available at: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. “Osama Bin Laden’s Threat: Is Nigeria Ready?,” *Nigeriaworld.com*, June 9, 2003, available at: <http://nigeriaworld.com/articles/2003/jun/094.html>.
 28. Nigeria’s “Middle Belt,” which includes Kaduna, Jos (Plateau State), and Abuja, is a region of central Nigeria populated by diverse ethnic groups. It is where majority Muslim northern Nigeria and majority Christian southern Nigeria meet and often clash, particularly over land use and during election season. *See*, for example, <http://theanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Ethnic-cleansing-in-the-Middle-Belt-Region-of-Nigeria-2015.pdf>.
 29. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/in-nations-with-significant-muslim-populations-much-disdain-for-isis/>
 30. Izala, formally Jama’at Izalat al Bid’a Wa Iqamat as Sunna (Society of Removal of Innovation and Re-establishment of the Sunna), also called JIBWIS, is a Salafist movement funded largely by the Gulf States in northern Nigeria to fight what it sees as the *bid’a* (innovation) practiced by the Sufi brotherhoods.
 31. *Takfir* refers to attributing *kufir* (apostasy) to a Muslim person, community, or government on the basis of their actions that are perceived to be “un-Islamic.” Jihadists embrace the possibility of applying *takfir* to groups and consider the fighting of such groups to be a justifiable, if not also a desirable, form of jihad.
 32. “Hausa-Fulani” reflects the intermarriage between the two ethnic groups over centuries, which has made them often indistinct from each other in Nigeria.
 33. There were historical debates between the leaders of the Hausa-Fulani Sokoto caliphate and the

Kanuri Kanem-Bornu empire over the legality of the Sokoto caliphate declaring Kanem-Borno as a lawful target of jihad. This was depicted in the correspondence between Muhammad Bello, the son of Usman dan Fodio, and the Kanem-Borno scholar Shaykh Muhammad El-Amin Al-Kanemi. While citing the book *Ajwibat al-Maghbilī 'an Asilat al-Amin al-Hajj Muhammad Askiya*, Bello stated three reasons for fighting the ruler of Kanem-Borno and his followers: their partial acceptance of Islam; their hostility towards those who embrace Islam; and their support and assistance to unbelievers fighting against the Muslims. See “uthmān Ibn Fūdī, ‘Najm al-ikhwān yahtadūna bihi fī ‘umūri al-zamān,” trans. Muhammad Isa Aliyu in *Selected Writings of Sheikh Othman Bin Fodiyo* (Gusau: Iqra'a Publishing House, 2013), vol. 3, p. 312–314. Murray Last and M.A. al-Hajj provided a more detailed account of the dispute between the leaders of the

Sokoto caliphate and the Kanem-Borno empire in Murray Last and M.A. al-Hajj, “Attempts at Defining Muslim in 19th-Century Hausaland and Bornu,” *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* 2(1965), pp. 232–233.

34. Kanuris form only 4% of the country's population compared to roughly 20% for Hausa-Fulanis. (Yorubas and Igbos in southern Nigeria are also about 20% of the population each.) “Tarihin Musulmai” (History of Muslims), YouTube, undated, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUQYNucjqUE>.

Al-Qaeda Reaches Into Nigeria

In March 2017, 46-year-old Ibrahim Harun, a national of Niger but born in Saudi Arabia, was convicted in the Eastern District of New York for conspiracy to murder U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan and bomb the U.S. embassy in Nigeria. Harun had traveled from Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan several weeks before the September 11, 2001 attacks to train with al-Qaeda. After September 11, Harun received weapons and explosives trainings in Afghanistan in preparation for the U.S. invasion. He later crossed the border to Pakistan, where he trained under Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi, one of bin Laden's deputies who was al-Qaeda's top military commander in Afghanistan. Harun's training enabled him carry out an ambush on the Afghan side of the border that killed two U.S. servicemen in 2003.

Harun, who was wounded in the operation, returned to Pakistan to recover, where he met Abu Faraj al-Libi, then al-Qaeda's external operations chief, and pledged *baya'a* (loyalty) to bin Laden. Harun also expressed interest in carrying out attacks on American interests in his native Africa similar to the 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The al-Qaeda representative to the GSPC³⁵ and Africa, Yemeni national Imad Abdel Wahid Ahmad Alwan, was killed in Algeria in 2002 after having visited Nigeria, Niger, and Chad. This left that position open for Harun to become his successor.

Harun thus traveled to Nigeria in 2003 on behalf of al-Qaeda's external operations unit with orders to target "the head of the snake" at "locations where Americans congregate," such as embassies, hotels and "places where they gather for fun." The U.S. embassy in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, was the main target, with the goal of an attack before the U.S. elections in 2004 to maximize its impact.³⁶ Harun connected with the Nigerian Taliban, whose leader, Muhammed Ali, had been a bin Laden disciple in Sudan in the 1990s, and recruited members of the Nigerian Taliban to scout the U.S. embassy. Once the attack plan was set, Harun deployed Ali's deputy and another Nigerian Taliban member to al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan to de-

liver the attack plans in encoded compact disks. Both couriers were arrested at the airport on arrival in Pakistan and deported back to Nigeria.

Fearing he was under suspicion, Harun immediately fled Nigeria to Libya, where he was arrested in 2005. Although he was released from prison during the Libyan uprising in 2011, he was re-arrested shortly afterwards in Italy on a boat with migrants. His latest plan, which was thwarted, had been to launch new attacks in Europe.

Al-Qaeda, in the end, received little reward, at least in the short term, on its investment in Harun's Nigerian mission. One of the main issues that al-Qaeda faced was that Harun was operating far from its base in Pakistan and neither al-Qaeda nor the Nigerian Taliban had a strong enough regional or local support network on the ground in West Africa or Nigeria for him to be able to carry out the desired attack in Abuja. Instead he had to send two Nigerian Taliban couriers all the way to Pakistan to deliver his attack plan and coordinate the training at the Nigerian Taliban's "Afghanistan" compound, which was under watch from—and ultimately broken up by—the Nigerian security forces.³⁷

If al-Qaeda could establish a stronger regional hub in West Africa to which operatives like Harun could report by overland travel and a stronger network of trained attackers on the ground in Nigeria, Harun's successors could have a greater chance of launching attacks. The solution could be to make the GSPC (or its successor, AQIM) the regional hub for operations in West Africa, and to co-opt the Nigerian Taliban to become a more formal part of al-Qaeda, including trainings in the Sahel that come along with that relationship.

Given the cards al-Qaeda was dealt for Nigeria—a pre-existing Salafi jihadi network and a northern Nigeria region ripe with admiration for the Afghan Taliban, sympathy for al-Qaeda, and anti-Western historical grievances—could al-Qaeda make the right moves in Nigeria after the failure of Harun's mission?

The following section discusses how al-Qaeda played its cards in Nigeria—from developing a relationship with the Nigerian Taliban under Muhammed Ali's leadership, to working behind the scenes with Muhammed Ali's successor, Muhammed Yusuf, after Ali's death to prepare the Nigerian

Taliban for a jihad, to cementing an operational relationship with Yusuf's successor, Abubakar Shekau, after Yusuf's death. This all set the basis for the network that would succeed in carrying out an operation years later on the UN building in Abuja, just as Harun had intended, and much more.

This collaboration, however, gave the way to new problems. With its Nigerian affiliate (albeit an informal one) two degrees of separation from al-Qaeda leadership via AQIM, al-Qaeda would encounter unexpected risks. This phase of interaction, adaptation, and strategic reassessment between al-Qaeda and the Nigerian Taliban—and what would become JAS—has escaped the attention of many analysts because much of the groundwork for the relationship occurred between 2004 and 2009 during a period of low violence, when the Nigerian Taliban's militancy was flying under the radar of most observers. But this an important foundation in understanding how the Nigerian Taliban developed to become the threat that JAS and West Africa Province are today.

Bin Laden's Early Encounters with Nigerians

The first—and most important—connection Bin Laden made in Nigeria was through the man who would become the founder of the Nigerian Taliban and its successors: Muhammed Ali. From Borno State, Muhammed Ali attended an Islamic university in Khartoum, Sudan in the mid-1990s when Bin Laden was living in Sudan and building the proto al-Qaeda organization that would carry out the U.S. embassy bombings in 1998. Ali and another young Nigerian, Khalid al-Barnawi, who was in Sudan fighting in the jihads against South Sudan, met with Bin Laden, and they became his followers and pledged their *baya'a* to him. Bin Laden, in turn, promised Ali seed funding of up to \$3 million to establish a jihadist movement in Nigeria.

While in Sudan, Ali began looking at the various Salafi networks in Nigeria to find a group to become a new jihadist movement. There were numerous Islamic scholars who, like the leading preacher of Izala, Sheikh Jafaar Adam Mahmoud, showed sympathy for al-Qaeda and its leaders such as bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi for their using “Western knowledge to counter the Americans.”³⁹ However, Sheikh Jafaar believed the best way to establish an Islamic government was to acquire Western education and then work from within the government—not necessarily

through violent jihad—to eliminate the perceived legacies of British colonialism (secularism and democracy, for example) and replace them with an Islamic system.⁴⁰ Any “mainstream” scholar from Izala would thus be an unlikely fit for Ali’s new movement.

However, some of the Izala breakoff groups presented opportunities. For example, a young preacher and mentee of Sheikh Jafaar, Muhammed Yusuf, commonly referenced Saudi Salafi jihadi theologians in his sermons and considered the “pure Salafists” to be 13th-century Islamic scholar and “father of wahabbism” Ibn Taymiya, Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Hassan al-Bana, the Taliban, and bin Laden.⁴¹ Yusuf was more predisposed to violent jihad than members of Izala, but some of his beliefs were ridiculed and considered extreme in Nigeria, such as his opposition to Western education (although he did make some concessions after debating Sheikh Jafaar).⁴²

Ultimately, Ali asked a Nigerian intermediary who was in Khartoum to coordinate with a preacher from Katsina State. But after Ali made contact with the preacher, the preacher came under government suspicion and fled to Saudi Arabia with some of bin Laden’s seed money.⁴³ Trust and direct contacts with allies were issues Ali may not have considered until this point.

When Ali returned to Nigeria after September 11, 2001, he connected with Muhammed Yusuf and made him one of his deputies in the then-emerging Nigerian Taliban. Together, they recruited members later described as “undergraduates of universities, polytechnics and other tertiary institutions across the country, who regard Western education as *Kafirci*” (infidelity);⁴⁴ “children of wealthy and influential Nigerians [whose] parents are based in Maiduguri” ; “men who [speak] impeccable English” ; “ex-military personnel and other professionals who quit their jobs, retreated to the [‘Afghanistan’ community], soaked up the *Quran*, and swore to oust the corrupt Nigerian system that they saw as antithetical to true Sharia” ; and “mainly middle-class Nigerian graduates inspired by the Taliban’s vision of a Islamic state, run in accordance with the principles of Saudi Arabia’s wahhabi sect of Islam.”

The Nigerian Taliban was thus fairly sophisticated, and even somewhat elitist. It was likely influenced not only by the Taliban’s defiance of the Americans after 2001 but also by the widespread media exposure the Taliban

received precisely because of the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. Numerous mainstream conspiracies in northern Nigeria generated resentment against the West and fed the Nigerian Taliban's narrative, such as that the U.S. (and Nigerian Christians) sought to use the polio vaccine to reduce Muslim fertility in northern Nigeria. Other Nigerian Taliban members joined the group because they were demoralized by what they perceived as a corrupt system in Nigeria: the Western university education they received was useless when the best jobs were given to political cronies. They came to believe that Western education was a scam.

As a result of the relative high status in society of some Nigerian Taliban members, they received support from family members and leaders or sympathizers within northern Nigeria's political and religious establishment. Some of these sponsors were disenchanted with the lack of full implementation of sharia, what they called "half-sharia," in northern Nigeria after its implementation in 2000. The Nigerian Taliban also benefitted from the support of bin Laden's seed money and other Nigerian Salafi sponsors with networks in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

By 2004—not long after Harun arrived in Nigeria—Ali had set up a community of Nigerian Taliban members and their families, called "Afghanistan," near the border with Niger in Yobe State, where the Nigerian Taliban lived according to the model of the Taliban. Details remain unclear, but Ali appears to have led the Nigerian Taliban in an attack on the Nigerian security forces around "Afghanistan" in late 2003 or early 2004 because the security forces were beginning to make plans to destroy the community, which they believed doubled as a militant training camp. The Nigerian Taliban were defeated in these clashes; Ali was killed; and his top deputy, who was one of Harun's couriers and had been deported from Pakistan, fled to Saudi Arabia. Other members were arrested; Harun's second courier, who had also been deported from Pakistan but freed in Nigeria and who provided Harun housing in Kano, was arrested in his home with maps of various diplomatic facilities.

After the failure of the Nigerian Taliban's first uprising, the group's new leader, Muhammed Yusuf, was forced to reassess the group's strategy. What lessons would he learn from the 2004 failure?

Yusuf and His Following

After Muhammed Ali was killed in 2004, Muhammed Yusuf fled to Saudi Arabia. However, he returned to Nigeria to take over the leadership of the Nigerian Taliban when the Borno State government and Salafist leaders negotiated his peaceful return. Yusuf now led a movement that was vengeful but weakened, but he also learned lessons from the failed uprising. He realized that the Nigerian Taliban must engage in *Iqamat al Hujja*—an Arabic-Islamic term for “establishing evidence” (in this case that the Nigerian government is *taghut*, or oppressive)—before declaring jihad.

His son, who would later become West Africa Province’s leader, said that what his father did was to:
 establish the nucleus of a jihadi group and called people to it. He did not start the jihadi work immediately, although he announced that the ultimate goal of the group is jihad.⁵¹

Yusuf believed that through a gradual approach the Nigerian Taliban would come out victorious in its next clashes with the Nigerian security forces because it would have more followers. Over the next five years, Yusuf followed this plan. Using “Western” items such as radio, television, CD, and cassette distribution to proselytize (a contradiction that Shekau, who became Yusuf’s deputy, reconciled in a sermon⁵²), he amassed an estimated 5,000 dedicated adherents among the tens of thousands who sympathized with him. Moreover, with funding from the same channels as Muhammed Ali accessed prior to 2004, as well as donations from followers, the Nigerian Taliban was able to open a headquarters in Maiduguri and in other centers in northeastern Nigeria.

At the same time as he was proselytizing, Yusuf was able to exploit the relationship with the GSPC. One of the couriers who Harun sent to Pakistan had established with the GSPC a relationship in which Nigerian Taliban members could train at GSPC camps in the Sahel. A Nigerian Taliban member who trained at these camps was Adam Kamar, the son of a wealthy Maiduguri, Borno State-based contractor; in 2006, he was arrested upon returning to Nigeria from training in the Sahel (he was also charged with killing a man in Kano, the capital of Kano State in northwest Nigeria).⁵³ One of the funders of Kamar’s group of 17 militants at that training

was Ilyas Damagun, a friend of Yusuf, who received money from Salafist organizations in Sudan to deploy Nigerian Taliban members for training in Mauritania. (Yusuf was arrested, but released after a period of time upon his return to Nigeria after the 2004 clashes because of his relations with Damagun.) In 2006, Damagun, two of his associates—one of whom studied Islam in Mauritania, and another who studied Islam in Saudi Arabia—and Kamar and Kamar's co-militants were all tried on terrorism charges in Nigeria but released, despite the prosecutor's personal belief that the evidence against Kamar was "undeniable."

Among the reasons for their release was that Nigerian Salafist leaders and northern Nigerian media outlets (Damagun owned the printing company for one such outlet) accused the Nigerian government of "perpetuating myths of an al-Qaeda presence" in Nigeria, engaging in "systematic and collective slander of Nigerian Muslims," and "employing the machinery of the state to victimize ... Muslim organizations and individuals ... to intimidate and harass Islamic clerics to check the spread of Islamic consciousness among the people under the guise of fundamentalism, extremism or terrorism."⁵⁴ Although Kamar's release was contingent on him engaging in a "de-radicalization program" in the custody of leading northern Nigerian imams, he later reverted back to terrorism, re-joined AQIM, and by 2012 became one of the three U.S.-designated Nigerian terrorists, along with Khalid al-Barnawi, who would go on to found Ansaru, and Shekau, who would later lead JAS.⁵⁵

As Yusuf gained in popularity and more clandestinely allowed Nigerian Taliban fighters to train with the GSPC, he became increasingly ostracized from Izala. He theologically deviated from Sheikh Jafaar on issues such as the permissibility of Western education and accused Jafaar of "selling out" by working within government while seeking to Islamicize its institutions. On top of this, it appears that by 2007 Jafaar recognized—and sought to pull back from—Yusuf's increasingly jihadist orientation. In April 2007, Yusuf's followers assassinated Jafaar in Kano in an operation that today remains mired in mystery. Its most plausible explanation is the concern of Yusuf's Salafi funders that Jafaar would expose and undermine them and collaborate with the Nigerian security forces to eliminate the Nigerian Taliban and the jihadist project in Nigeria.⁵⁶

This assassination drove a wedge not only between Yusuf and the Nigerian government but also between Yusuf and the prevailing Islamic religious authorities, and forced him to limit his preaching mostly to his native region of Borno and Yobe. Yusuf's third-in-command, Mamman Nur, a Kanuri like Yusuf and Shekau, preached about reviving the historical narratives of the fallen Islamic empires of Kanem-Borno (in present-day northeastern Nigeria) as well as Usman dan Fodio's Sokoto caliphate (in present-day northwestern Nigeria).⁵⁷ Shekau, Yusuf's deputy, continued to call for opposing Western civilization in all its manifestations: education, social values, and symbols (i.e., the Gregorian calendar and New Year's holiday). This trio—Yusuf, Nur, and Shekau—formed the new generation of leadership of the Nigerian Taliban, which was gaining a following throughout the Lake Chad region but also becoming notorious for preaching that *boko* was *haram*.

As Yusuf had anticipated, the 2004 clashes recurred in similar fashion in July 2009. In this dispute, security forces shot Yusuf's followers who refused police orders to wear motorcycle helmets because they believed such head coverings were an "affront to Allah." Shortly after visiting a hospital where his followers were receiving treatment, Yusuf warned in a sermon that Nigeria would turn into a "land of jihad" like Palestine, Chechnya, Somalia, Kashmir, Algeria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.⁵⁸ Nigerian president Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, a Muslim born in Katsina State, ordered Nigerian security forces to "crush" the Nigerian Taliban.

In ensuing confrontations, the security forces killed nearly 1,000 of Yusuf's followers, arrested hundreds of others, and uncovered arms stockpiles in Yusuf's centers. Several dozen security officers were also killed.⁵⁹ The security forces destroyed Yusuf's main headquarters in Borno State's capital of Maiduguri and interrogated Yusuf before dragging him outside and executing him. The videos of Yusuf's interrogation and killings of his followers and the photograph of Yusuf's mutilated corpse were spread widely on the Internet.⁶⁰ Nigerians on jihadist forums began calling for "sustaining the dignity of the Sokoto jihad" and unifying with the "brothers of Chechnya, the unrelenting gladiators of Afghanistan, the fierce brothers of Iraq, the troops of *Muwahhidin* [monotheists] in Somalia and the Brigades of *Tawhid* [monotheism] in Nigeria."⁶¹

Both the Nigerians who had trained abroad with the GSPC and those who had stayed with Yusuf in Nigeria decided it was now time for them to begin a jihad. The issue was how to succeed. By 2009, al-Qaeda had established an affiliate in Iraq, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and used Iraq as a base to deepen relationships with Algerians in AQIM who traveled to Iraq to fight. Al-Qaeda also deepened its relationship with al-Shabab in Somalia via its Yemen-based affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).⁶² Therefore, the Nigerian Taliban was no longer forced to liaise with al-Qaeda in Pakistan via couriers like it had done in 2003; it could instead liaise with al-Qaeda's regional hubs, AQIM and al-Shabab.

Al-Qaeda had prepared its organizational structure for this “opportunity” in Nigeria, but could it succeed? What came next was a major adaptation: Shekau, Yusuf's successor, took advantage of over a decade of Nigerian Taliban-GSPC/AQIM contacts to seek support in moving from the “preaching,” or *dawa*, phase, to the jihad phase.

Shekau and AQIM Connect

Shekau had been shot in the leg in the July 2009 clashes and declared dead, but unbeknownst to the security forces, his followers rescued him.⁶³ His first action was to operationalize the previous ties to AQIM and send Khalid al-Barnawi and two other militants to meet with AQIM commander for the Sahel, Abu Zeid, who ran the training camps for Nigerian Taliban members. They met in the days after the July 2009 clashes to, in Abu Zeid's words, “consult on waging jihad in Nigeria.” Abu Zeid, who knew the three militants already, relayed their requests to AQIM leader Abu Musab Abdul Wadud, who then reported about the meeting to bin Laden in Pakistan.⁶⁴

The outcome of this meeting with Abu Zeid was a key turning point for the Nigerian Taliban. The meeting showed the value for JAS of partnering with AQIM, which for years had been extending its reach into sub-Saharan West Africa. AQIM would provide JAS with the resources it needed to launch the “guerilla war” that Shekau requested help with.

The meeting—and AQIM's support for JAS—changed JAS's trajectory in five important ways: narratives, communications, coordination, finances, and training.

Narratives

First, through public statements, al-Qaeda made clear that the former Nigerian Taliban—the new JAS—was part of its network. AQIM initially publicly welcomed JAS into the al-Qaeda network. In August 2009—days after the meeting with Abu Zeid—an AQIM statement said “the killing of Yusuf was proof of a Crusader war against Islam.” In February 2010, AQIM leader Abdul Wadud issued a statement calling on Nigerian Muslims to fight “the Crusaders” in the same way that al-Shabab was fighting Ethiopian troops in Somalia, promising to provide the “Nigerian mujahidin” with “men, arms, and ammunition” to “defend” Nigerian Muslims against the alleged “Christian minority.”⁶⁵ Just before the one-year anniversary of Yusuf’s death, AQIM’s own media agency, al-Andalus, released a statement from Shekau declaring jihad against Nigeria and the U.S. and expressing support for al-Qaeda, thus disproving claims that he was dead (and embarrassing the Nigerian security forces who at first called the images of Shekau to appear after July 2009 a “digital manipulation”).⁶⁶ On the one-year anniversary of Yusuf’s death, al-Shabab and AQI offered condolences to JAS.

JAS, for its part, released several low-quality videos on YouTube in 2010 and early 2011 with support from Nigerians who trained in media with AQIM. In particular, JAS created *nasheeds*,⁶⁷ or Islamic chants, in Hausa folk style to venerate Shekau and compare him to other global jihadist leaders such as Bin Laden and al-Zarqawi. One *nasheed*, for example, said:

Greetings to you, Abubakar Shekau, the hero, the masquerade [fearful figure] to the Jews. Shekau, the hater of Jews, masquerade for the infidels and a big problem for the white race [Western nations]. Oh people, our name is al-Qaeda, if you are looking for terrorists, we are here and we are telling you, we hate the Americans.⁶⁸

Other *nasheeds* called Shekau a “lion” and a “scholar,” called out Izala for believing that “politics [democracy] are better than prayers [Islam],” denied that JAS was *khawarij*,⁶⁹ as Izala claimed, and promised revenge for Yusuf’s murder and the imprisonment of JAS members and their kin.⁷⁰ Shekau was focused on building a cult of personality around his leadership in Nigeria to the exclusion of other JAS members, such as Mamman Nur, who had begun training with AQIM and al-Shabab. By focusing on revenge for the July 2009 clashes and near-enemy themes, such as the “infidelity” of the Nige-

rian state, while embracing—and enjoying legitimacy from—al-Qaeda, Shekau ensured that he would remain the most relevant JAS leader. The more experienced, transnational militants like Nur, Khalid al-Barnawi, and Adam Kamar would, in contrast, be strictly operational.

Communications

The second result of the meeting with Abu Zeid was that AQIM set up a line of communication between Shekau and bin Laden, which Khalid al-Barnawi requested. In a letter sent to bin Laden, Shekau said he wanted to “learn the system of the organization,” although this did not lead to formal affiliation.⁷¹ By 2010, bin Laden was cautious in promoting new affiliates after having seen how AQI’s excessive violence harmed al-Qaeda’s reputation due to the failure to properly vet its leader, al-Zarqawi. Furthermore, back-channel communications and a low-profile relationship between al-Qaeda, JAS, and al-Qaeda allies could reduce international counterinsurgent pressure on them. If JAS was known as “al-Qaeda in Nigeria,” such pressure would only increase.⁷²

Coordination

Third, AQIM set up an intermediary between AQIM and JAS in Niger. Abu Zeid said at the meeting “communications via Internet and phone ... would be easy to manage,” although he noted the intermediary would “have a short lifespan.”⁷³ The intermediary, Adam Kamar, who had been arrested but released in 2007 for his involvement with the GSPC, had the experience and trust of AQIM and after Bin Laden’s death in 2011, would develop a line of communication to al-Zawahiri and al-Shabab.⁷⁴

Finances

Fourth, AQIM provided a \$250,000 “investment” to kidnap foreign engineers in Nigeria, in order to press Western governments on al-Qaeda’s political demands and to receive ransoms to share with AQIM.⁷⁵ It appears this order came from bin Laden, who had instructed AQIM to give 200,000 euro (then the equivalent of \$250,000) to Yunus al-Mauritani, who was a former GSPC member and became the head of the al-Qaeda External Operations Unit for Africa after Harun’s arrest. Al-Mauritani then likely gave the money to Kamar and Khalid al-Barnawi.⁷⁶

Training

The fifth, and final, result of the meeting with Abu Zeid was that AQIM would provide “practical trainings” (as opposed to what Abu Zeid considered to be “theoretical [ideological] trainings”) to JAS fighters in the Sahel. This was in response to Khalid al-Barnawi’s request for training of JAS fighters in intervals of 200 fighters at a time.

After the meeting, therefore, JAS was set to bring terrorism to Nigeria in a way the country had never seen and did not expect. But like any transition, things do not always go according to plan—even when the plan succeeds. The Nigerian AQIM veterans who received the money from and maintained direct contact with AQIM, led by Khalid al-Barnawi, had their own ideas on how AQIM’s support should be used in Nigeria, while Shekau had other ideas. The former group preferred targeting the “far enemy”⁷⁷ in Nigeria (i.e., Western interests or international organizations), while the latter sought to target almost exclusively the “near enemy” in Nigeria (i.e., the Nigerian government, Nigerians Muslims associated with the government, and Christians). While at first Nigerian AQIM veterans would operate under the JAS banner and under Shekau’s leadership, their strategic differences on issues such as the “far enemy” and “near enemy” began to reflect broader ideological differences in a way that made the relationship unsustainable. As a result, a new group, Ansaru, led by Khalid al-Barnawi, would ultimately split from both JAS factions.

The following section shows the risks that came along with AQIM investing in a group whose leader, Shekau, was not properly vetted, just as with al-Zarqawi. The friction with JAS—especially directly with Shekau—would force AQIM to reassess the relationship altogether.

Discussion Questions

1. To what extent was it a challenge in Nigeria that even leading preachers who rejected Yusuf’s core teachings nonetheless showed admiration for al-Qaeda? How was it a problem for Nigeria that there was a general distrust in the government about its terrorism prosecutions? What are ways that Nigeria could remedy this “credibility gap”?

2. To what extent was Muhammed Yusuf an “extremist,” given that he was competing among the highest echelons of Islamic leadership in northern Nigeria? How can this term be misleading, or useful? Moreover, how can governments deal with groups that are extremist and aspire to violent jihad, but are, at least temporarily, mostly nonviolent and focused on preaching, spreading their message, and recruitment?
3. What indications existed that the crackdown in 2009 could have much different results than the crackdown in 2004? How could Nigeria have better handled the helmet issue? Moreover, in terms of leadership, based on the brief samples of Mamman Nur and Shekau, how might their perspectives on waging a jihad after 2009 differ?
4. What do the early *nasheeds* about Shekau suggest about his leadership style and those who follow him? How does this “internal” JAS messaging differ from Shekau’s or AQIM’s “externally” focused messaging, and why?
5. The meeting between Khalid al-Barnawi and two other militants with Abu Zeid immediately after the July 2009 clashes, AQIM’s posting of a Shekau statement on an online forum, and Shekau’s correspondences to Bin Laden suggest a high-level leadership relationship between Shekau and al-Qaeda and ease of access of communication between them even before any post-July 2009 violence had broken out. What could this suggest for the prospects of terrorism in Nigeria after July 2009? What factors would have contributed to the likelihood of violence by JAS? What could be done to prevent, or mitigate, the potential for violence at this stage?
6. Is there a paradox that (1) al-Qaeda “welcomed” JAS publicly into its network after 2009, (2) but maintained a low enough profile about the relationship so as to not make JAS a formal affiliate, while (3) also having a strategy to provoke or overextend the West in Nigeria? Are there times when al-Qaeda wants to provoke and other times when it wants to be “left alone”?

Notes

35. AQIM's predecessor.
36. Pervez Musharraf, "In the Line of Fire," Free Press, November 18, 2008.
37. Andrea Brigaglia is one of the few scholars who hypothesized that "Kanamma [the name of the town where "Afghanistan" was located] was not hosting a simple commune, but a training camp for (al-Qaeda's?) [*sic*] militants, and that the confrontation with the authorities [that] occurred during 2003 was not the unintended outcome of a disputation between local villagers and an overzealous religious community over fishing rights, but the result of an attempt by the Nigerian security to dismantle the camp – possibly the first of its kind in the history of Nigeria." Andrea Brigaglia, *The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram*, Diritto e Questioni pubbliche, 2015, vol. 15, no. 2.
38. Al-Risalah, Issue 4, January 2017; "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency," Africa Report No. 216, April 3, 2014.
39. "The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Salafi Counter-Radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram," Journal of Religion in Africa 42 (2012) 118-144.
40. Scholar Andrea Brigaglia emphasizes that one should not "indict [Jafaar] Adam by claiming that statements such as this amount to a full declaration of loyalty to al-Qaeda and to an endorsement of the latter's attacks targeting civilians. His could have been only a rhetorical device to argue against the logic of Yusuf's combined support for global jihad and veto on the Western education that only provides the necessary tool to conduct jihad in the modern world. Adam's speeches on the issue of al-Qaeda's global jihad followed a complex trajectory, evolving from a seeming support in the early 2000s, to an increasingly wary attitude from 2004 onwards, that led him to avoid taking any position publicly." Brigaglia, Andrea, *The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram*, Diritto e Questioni pubbliche, 2015, vol. 15, n. 2, DOI: 10.1163/15700666-12341224.
41. Nigerian Islamic clerics who were critical of Yusuf compared to him to al-Qaeda ideologues, such as Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi, who would later write a treatise advising Nigerian jihadists after Yusuf's death in 2009. Yusuf's own reference points in his sermons suggest, however, that he was inspired by Abudallah Azzam (Palestinian al-Qaeda founder in Afghanistan alongside bin Laden in the 1980s), bin Laden, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (a Jordanian jihadist in Afghanistan in the 1990s and first leader of the predecessor groups to Islamic State). However, Yusuf mostly referenced the writings of contemporary Saudi Salafi-jihadi scholars to justify his religious teachings. See also "Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi Answers Question on How Best to Further the Jihadist Movement in Nigeria," Memri, March 9, 2010, available at: http://www.memrijttm.org/content/en/blog_personal.htm?id=3042%C2%B6m=JT.
42. Indeed, one of the key challenges for Nigeria has been the extent to which even leading preachers have or denied its existence in Nigeria. Preachers have also attributed al-Qaeda to being a conspiracy of America, Israel, or the West, even if they rejected al-Qaeda's teachings on the whole. Sheik Jafaar, a leader of Izala, for example, engaged in a series of public debates with Yusuf in 2007. He exposed Yusuf for being hypocritical because Yusuf used a passport even though he claimed it was an act of "infidelity" to receive services from the Nigerian government. Sheikh Jafaar also argued that the Islamic principles of "necessity" and "collective interest" meant Nigerian Muslims should receive Western education and serve in the Nigerian government or else Muslims would fall further behind the Christians and thus be forced to receive more services from Christians, such as at hospitals. "Mallam Abubakar Shekau," by Abubakar Shekau, February 16, 2009. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQY4GLtzLdU>
43. Al-Risalah, Issue 4, January 2017.
44. Kamal Tayo Oropo, "How Talibans Recruit, Operate Nationwide," The Guardian, January 18, 2004, available at: <http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=4235>.
45. Senan John Murray, "Interpol Trails Yobe Taliban Leader to Saudi," The Punch, January 29, 2004.
46. Kamal Tayo Oropo, "How Talibans Recruit, Operate Nationwide," The Guardian, January 18, 2004, available at: <http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=4235>.
47. "Taliban Riots in Yobe," The Guardian, January 28, 2004.
48. "Radical Islamic Group Storms Yobe State Capital, One Policemen Killed," AFP, January 4, 2003.

49. One of Nigeria's most popular Salafi preachers, Sheikh Albani, who was assassinated in 2014 in an attack claimed by Shekau, for example, said, "We do not agree with the polio vaccine nor do we agree with WHO (World Health Organization). The WHO is a Jewish organization to harm Africans through food and medicines." He discouraged his followers and students from accepting the polio vaccine in a series of lectures. Despite opposing "Boko Haram" for its rejection of Western education and excessive violence, which is why JAS assassinated him, Sheikh Albani also said, "I am not convinced that what is happening now is being perpetrated by Boko Haram ... over 90% of bomb blasts in Pakistan are sponsored by agents of other countries ... Some of those countries are predicting the collapse of Nigeria by 2015 ... you can't rule out the Western conspiracy and their representatives in Nigeria." "Boko Haram Leader Claims Responsibility for Killing Kaduna Cleric Sheikh Albani, Threatens to Attack Refineries in the Niger Delta," Sahara Reporters, February 20 2014, available at: <http://saharareporters.com/newspage/boko-haram-leader-claims-responsibility-killing-kaduna-cleric-sheik-albani-threatens-attac>. Also see "Radical Zaria Islamic Preacher 'Albani Zaria' and Wife Killed by Unknown Gunmen," February 1, 2014, available at: <http://saharareporters.com/news-page/radical-zaria-islamic-preacher-albani-zaria-andwife-killed-unknown-gunmen>; "Shaikh Muhammad Auwal Adam Albany Zaria (W.H.O. Taji Tsoro 1) (World Health Organization (WHO) Was Scared)," February 6 2013, YouTube, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Owd0XxiO95s>; "Shaikh Muhammad Auwal Adam Albani Zaria: Tambayoyi da Amsoshi Akan Polio da Allurai na Rigakafi 2 (Sheikh Mohammad Auwal Albani Zaria: Questions and Answers on Polio and Vaccines Part 2)," June 10, 2013, YouTube, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgkF12MCvBE>; and Elishe P. Renne, "The Politics of Polio in Northern Nigeria," Indiana University Press, July 12, 2010.
50. Andrea Brigaglia, *The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram*, Diritto e Questioni pubbliche, 2015, vol. 15, n. 2.
51. Al-Naba, Issue 41, available at: <http://jihadology.net/2016/08/02/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-41/>.
52. Abubakar Shekau, Mallam Abubakar Shekau, February 16, 2009, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQY4GLtzLdU>. Shekau said, "Yes, Western civilization is bad and forbidden [he smiles], the items; microphone, electricity, and mobile phones, all products of Western civilization are good but the Western civilization in itself is not good. Western civilization tells us that the sun is static, is that good? Is the sun being static a microphone? In fact even without Western civilization, things like microphones and mobile phones can still be produced. Western education is meant to pull a wool across your eyes. Someone may have a master's or graduate degree in engineering without actually knowing how to fix a bicycle. There are others who without a single degree or education can still fix a motorcycle. Will you say such a person was empowered by Western education? The only thing you cannot learn on your own except by going before a scholar is the Qur'an. Any other thing could be learnt from natural intelligence without going to school. Western civilization has simply constructed a system whereby anything achieved outside its precincts is regarded as useless, unacceptable, and outside the law. At the end, everything in the world belongs to Allah and if you cannot follow the law of Allah, then leave the world and look for your own world. May Allah Protect, may Allah curse the Jews because the Jews have created a division within our ranks." Western civilization has simply constructed a system whereby anything achieved outside its precincts is regarded as useless, unacceptable, and outside the law. At the end, everything in the world belongs to Allah and if you cannot follow the law of Allah, then leave the world and look for your own world. May Allah Protect, may Allah curse the Jews because the Jews have created a division within our ranks."
53. "The Big Hunt," Tell [Lagos], April 26, 2004.
54. Daily Trust, November 21, 2007 (online commenter); This Day, December 10, 2007 (online commenter); "Nigeria: Security Services Investigate Suspected Islamic Terror Camp Training," Lagos Insider, July 26, 2004 pp 39, 40.
55. "Faltering al-Qaeda Turns to Boko Haram," Magharebia, January 27, 2012; "Terrorist Designations of Boko Haram Commander Abubakar Shekau, Khalid al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kambay," U.S. Department of State, June 21, 2012; "Boko Haram: Jonathan Moves to End Secret Deal Between SSS and Northern Traditional Leaders," The Nigerian Voice, September 11, 2011, available at: <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/69677/6/boko-haram-jonathan-moves-to-end-secret-deal-betwe.html>.
56. Andrea Brigaglia, "A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da'wa in West Africa: The Career and the Murder of Shaykh Ja'far

- Mahmoud Adam (Daura, ca. 1961/1962-Kano 2007),” *Islamic Africa*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 2012.
57. Nur said, for example, “When the British, French, and the Japanese colonialists reached the Hausa state [of Usman Dan Fodio] and the Borno empire under the rule of [Frederick] Lugard (may Allah’s curse be upon him) killed the Muslims, destroyed their houses and mosques, burned the flag of ‘there is no god except Allah,’ urinated on the Quran, and ended the state that was established by Usman dan Fodio ... [then] Allah took away peace and stability [from the Muslims].” “Lecture on Returning to the Path of the Qurān and Sunna by Muhammad Mamman Nur and Muhammad Yusuf,” March 15, 2009, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUor3BrT0FE>.
 58. Muhammad Bukar, “waazin shekh muhammad yusuf maiduguri 3,” (undated, from pre-2009), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nYGyEA1Y8>.
 59. “Nigeria Accused of Ignoring Sect Warnings Before Wave of Killings,” *Thu Guardian*, August 2, 2009, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/02/nigeria-boko-haram-islamist-sect>.
 60. “Boko Haram” leader Mohammed Yusuf Interrogation before his execution by Nigerian security agents,” Youtube, August 3, 2009, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePpUvfTXY7w&t=10s>.
 61. In April 2011, the “*mujahidin* brothers in Nigeria” also promised to “spearhead the call to global jihad against the apostates and their allies,” “open up a dungeon for Obama,” and “raise the banner for al-Qaeda in the West Africa Province” for the brothers in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Nigeria, Togo, Benin, and Niger. Abu Muslim al-Jazaari, “The Platform of Tawhid and Jihad,” *jihadology.net*, March 2011; “The Brigades of Tawhid in Nigeria,” *Arrahmah.com*, August 22, 2009; “From Your Mujahideen Brothers in Nigeria,” *Ansar1.info*, April 2, 2011; “Periodical Review July 2010 – No. 2,” ICT’s Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, August 2010; “Islamist Sect Website Claims Nigerian Bombings,” *Agence France-Presse*, December 28, 2010.
 62. The GSPC developed from the Algerian government’s blocking Islamist parties from coming to power after elections in 1992 and the ensuing civil war, while the ICU emerged out of Somalia’s years of civil war with a self-declared mandate to unite the country and its various clans through the harsh imposition of sharia law.
- The ICU would later acquire a broader revenge motive and rename itself al-Shabab after Ethiopian troops who were perceived to be backed by the “Crusaders” entered Somalia and ousted the ICU from power in 2006.
63. Njadvara Musathe, “Police Kill Leader of Nigerian Taliban,” AP, July 31, 2009.
 64. “Praise Be to God the Lord of All Worlds,” Bin Laden’s Bookshelf—odNI, released march 2016, available at <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2016/english/Praise%20be%20to%20god%20the%20lord%20of%20all%20worlds.pdf>.
 65. Other AQIM statements over the next year warned about Western interference in Nigeria, and other West African countries called for AQIM to translate messages into Hausa and other Nigerian languages and promised revenge for Yusuf’s death. Droukdel also praised the “heroic jihadist Umar Farouk [Abdulmutallib],” a Nigerian who attempted to detonate an underwear bomb on a Detroit-bound airline on behalf of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) on Christmas Day in 2009. “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Condolence, Support and Comfort for Our Brothers and People in Nigeria 20/08/09,” available at www.ansar1.info/showthread.php?t=11556; “North Africa Qaeda Offers to Help Nigerian Muslims,” Reuters, February 1, 2010.
 66. Daily Independent [Lagos], July 3, 2010; Nigerian Tribune, July 7, 2010. “Message of Condolence to the Mujāhidin by Abubakar Shekau,” available at: <http://jihadology.net/2010/07/12/new-message-from-the-leader-of-buku-boko-%E1%B8%A5aram-in-nigeria-risalat-taaizyyah/>.
 67. For more information on *nasheeds* (plural *anashid*), see Thomas Hegghammer, “Why Terrorists Weep: The Socio-Cultural Practices of Jihadi Militants,” Paul Wilkinson Memorial Lecture, Univ of St. Andrews, April 16, 2015, available at http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_Wilkinson_Memorial_Lecture.pdf.
 68. “Sako daga shekau,” YouTube, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ChTgAjppoyY>.
 69. *Khawarij* refers to a tendency by Muslims to excommunicate (make *takfir* against) other Muslims not just for sins that do not merit excommunication but simply for reasons of political exclusivism. Al-Qaeda has often used this term to refer to Islamic State. See Kyle J. Orton, “Who Are the Khawarij?,” April 17, 2014, available at: <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2014/04/17/who-are-the-khawarij/>.

70. "We are not boko haram but ahlussunnah," YouTube, Oct 28, 2011, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2bEHaA0iX0>.
71. It is unclear at what point this document reached bin Laden before his death in 2011 or whether he responded—or whether he died before he could respond. "Praise Be to God the Lord of All Worlds," Bin Laden's Bookshelf—odNI, released March 2016, available at <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2016/english/Praise%20be%20to%20god%20the%20lord%20of%20all%20worlds.pdf>.
72. Al-Shabab would only become a formal affiliate after al-Zawahiri succeeded bin Laden after his death in 2011. "Bin Laden Wanted to Change al-Qaida's Bloodied Name," *The Guardian*, June 24, 2011, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/24/bin-laden-documents-alqaida-struggle>.
73. Director of National Intelligence, "Letter from Abdallah Abu Zayd Abd-al-Hamid to Abu Musab Abd-al-Wadud," Bin Laden's Bookshelf, August 2009 (released January 2017) available at: <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/english/Letter%20from%20Abdallah%20Abu%20Zayd%20Abd-al-Hamid%20to%20Abu%20Musab%20Abd-al-Wadud.pdf>.
74. Indeed, his very first operation may have been coordinating AQIM's kidnapping of two Frenchmen in Niamey, Niger in early 2011, just months before AQIM set up the foundation for the emergence of Ansaru in Nigeria. Kamar's name was never mentioned as this intermediary, but the author suspects it was him because he had the trust of the GSPC, was from Borno, had operated in the Sahel, and reportedly had a link to al-Zawahiri. Moreover, by process of elimination, other key leaders had different roles, such as Shekau, Mamman Nur, and Khalid al-Barnawi. "Nigeria: Taking the Hostage Road," *Africa Confidential*, March 15, 2013.
75. *New York Times*, January 26, 2012; "New Qaeda Spin-Off Threatens West Africa"; "Exclusive: Boko Haram Targets Julius Berger, Dantata & Sawoe Expatriates"; "Boko Haram Gets N40million Donation From Algeria," *Sahara Reporters*, May 13, 2012.
76. "Boko Haram Looks to Mali," *Africa Confidential*, November 30, 2012. "Letters from Abbotabad: Bin Laden Sidelined," *Harmony Program*, SOCOM-2012-0000019-HT.
77. For a discussion of the "far enemy" and "near enemy" and the ways both concepts have become "hybridized," see Thomas Hegghammer, "The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, November 18, 2009, available at http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_The_Ideological_Hybridization_of_Jihadi_Groups.pdf.

AQIM Enters Nigeria

It was Eid al-Adha in Bauchi State on September 7, 2010, and Muslims filtered into the mosque from around Bauchi city for evening prayers. The worshippers were so many that rows of men extended from the mosque's courtyard into the streets until their backs were against the city's main prison walls, nearly 500 meters away. As worshippers prostrated, 50 men leapt up, declaring, "We're not here to kill anyone, only to free our followers ..." They shot AK-47s into the air, tackled the imam, and detonated explosives around the prison walls—just high enough to open holes to run through, but small enough so the walls didn't collapse and force them to climb mounds of concrete to enter the prison. In total, the attackers freed 750 prisoners, including 150 of Yusuf's followers who had been detained during the July 2009 clashes.⁷⁸

JAS claimed responsibility for the prison break and warned of more attacks to come in pamphlets released in Bauchi the day after the attack, demonstrating its new capability to combine militancy with strategic communication.

For the Nigerian security forces, the Bauchi prison break was a wake-up call. It quickly became apparent that the Nigerian Taliban had not been crushed in the 2009 uprising: it had only been hibernating and re-emerged as JAS. The statements from AQIM, AQI, al-Shabab, and Shekau after Yusuf's death had not been just rhetoric but a call to action. JAS was on the verge of becoming a more organized, more capable, and more violent successor of the Nigerian Taliban.

JAS attacks would only escalate over the next two years from late 2010 to late 2012 in northern Nigeria. But for al-Qaeda, which finally sought its plan for Nigeria realized, this development was not all good: while AQIM did not oppose "near enemy" attacks, it was Shekau's tolerance—and even enthusiasm—for killing "apostates," which he broadly interpreted to include Muslim civilians who participated in democracy, that forced al-Qaeda to recoil. Al-Qaeda had been trying to cleanse itself of the image of

killing innocent civilians, like al-Zarqawi’s atrocities in Iraq. Shekau would prove to be a liability.

The perpetrators of attacks from 2010-2012 can be categorized into the following three entities with their corresponding areas of operations:

- The JAS Shekau faction carried out attacks in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, and Gombe, or “northeastern Nigeria”;
- The JAS AQIM faction included the rest of northern Nigeria, such as the capital of Abuja, and Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Jigawa, Kaduna, Zamfara, Nassarawa, Niger, Taraba, and Plateau; and
- Ansaru, which operated in roughly the same areas as the JAS AQIM faction.

Kano—northern Nigeria’s largest city and the geographic, political, economic, and religious center of the region —was a “mutual area of operations” in which both JAS factions and Ansaru interacted but also clashed. The next

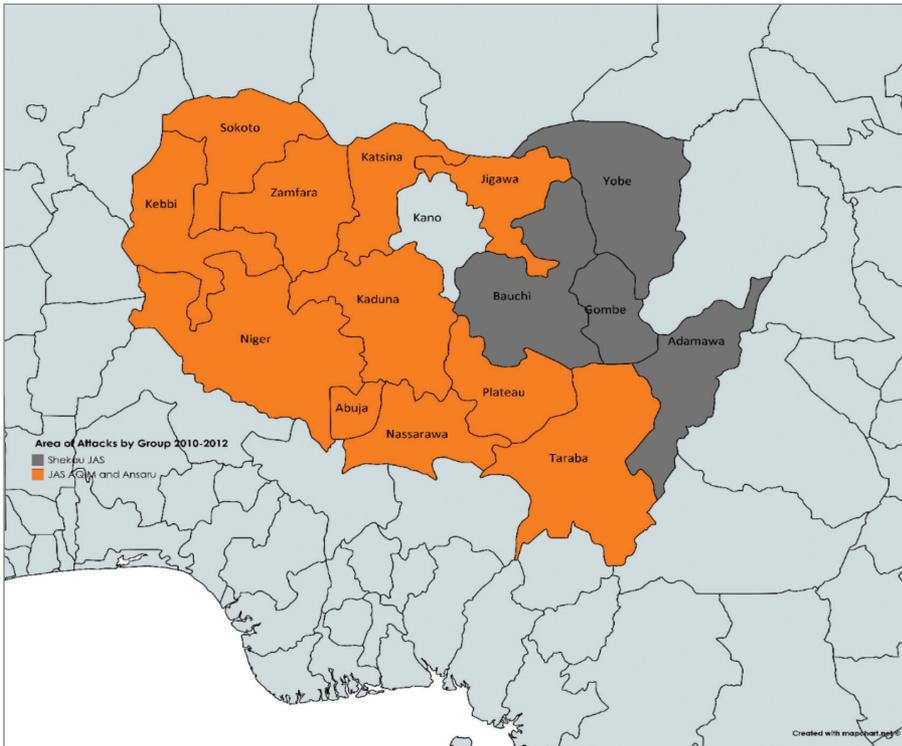


Figure 2.1. Locations of attacks by JAS and Ansaru from 2010-2012

section investigates the role, membership, strategies, and evolution of the JAS Shekau faction, the JAS AQIM faction, and Ansaru. As you read it, consider the following:

- In 2010, there were only around a dozen attacks after the Bauchi prison break, and virtually all were in the AO of the JAS Shekau faction.
- In 2011, there were 69 attacks in the AO of the JAS Shekau faction and 9 attacks in the AO of the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru.
- In 2012, Nigeria saw 419 attacks credibly attributed to JAS and Ansaru. Approximately 70% (289 attacks) were in the AO of the JAS Shekau faction and approximately 14% (59 attacks) were in the AO of the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru (including the majority, 39 attacks, in Kaduna). Approximately 16% (71 attacks) were in the mutual AO in Kano. These percentages were similar to those of 2011.

The JAS Shekau Faction

In the two years after the Bauchi prison break, attacks gradually increased in the JAS Shekau faction's AO, becoming an almost daily occurrence. These at-

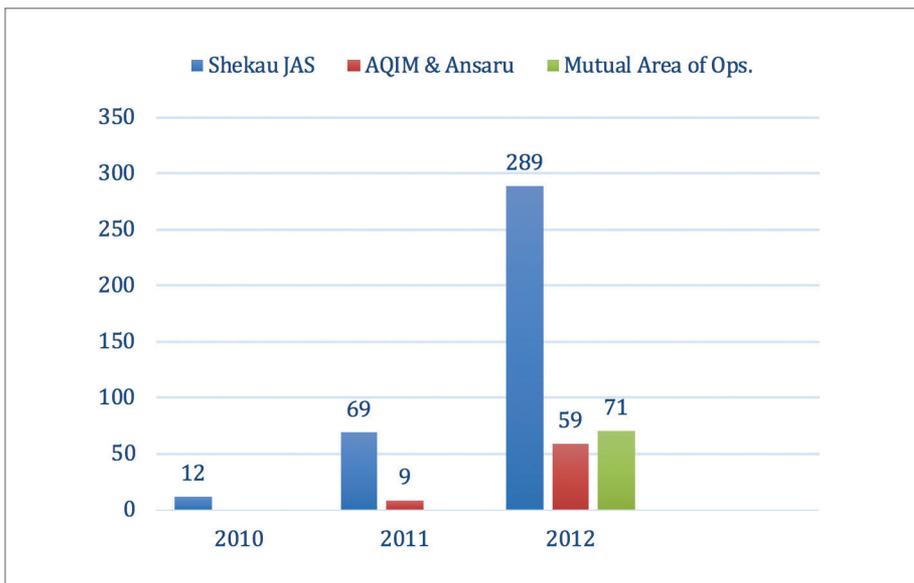


Figure 2.2. JAS, JAS AQIM, and Ansaru attacks 2010-2012

tacks tended to be assassinations of Muslim religious leaders, especially Salafists, who opposed JAS and of civil servants, as well as bombings of prisons, banks, churches, and beer halls or other “un-Islamic” places where civilians congregated. There were few large-scale or sophisticated attacks that required high-level training or that gained national-level attention.

Two attacks, however, were notable exceptions: the “urban invasions” in Damatru, Yobe’s capital, in November 2011 and a January 2012 attack in Kano. Dozens of fighters choked off the main traffic arteries in both cities and attacked government facilities. Both attacks resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties, with up to 100 and 200 killed in Damatru and Kano, respectively, although government officials were the main targets. The Kano attack was pre-warned, ordered, and claimed by Shekau, who was based there at the time of the attack, and the belongings of the attackers who died showed signs that they had been reading AQI bomb-making manuals. The indiscriminate violence in the Shekau faction attacks, especially the targeting of Salafi preachers who opposed—or were even neutral toward—JAS, was a cause of concern for some former Nigerian Taliban members, let alone AQIM. One group calling itself the Yusufiya Islamic Movement issued pamphlets in Maiduguri saying it was:

concerned that some people with evil motives have infiltrated our genuine struggle with a false jihad that is un-Islamic. We therefore distance our group from all the bombings targeted at civilians and other establishments and equally condemn them ... This is necessary in the light of genuine concern by individuals and groups to the mass suffering of innocent citizens caught in the crossfire between our members and the Nigerian troops.⁷⁹

Damatru was JAS’s first attack that saw significant civilian casualties, and al-Qaeda supporters subsequently expressed concern about JAS’s killings. The rise in al-Qaeda interest, and concern, about JAS came after the senior al-Qaida leader responsible for external operations, Abu Yahya al-Libi, credited AQIM with training JAS, whose spokesman for Shekau at the time, Abu Qaqa, who was freed in the Bauchi prison break, openly admitted a relationship with al-Qaeda.⁸⁰ One al-Qaeda supporter said that JAS attacks would lead to a backlash that would alienate innocent Muslims or cause them to be attacked by Christians and the government. Another AQIM member nonetheless claimed that JAS was “one of the fruits of

AQIM's jihad" and took pride "that many of its fighters had trained in AQIM's camps."⁸¹

Although JAS attacks represented a low-grade insurgency, which was focused primarily on urban areas and showed that Shekau had a sufficient number of followers to carry out near-daily attacks, the violence predominantly affected people in Borno and Yobe. What Shekau had, therefore, was manpower—a large number of motivated fighters concentrated in northeastern Nigeria. However, the fighters neither demonstrated that they received training in sophisticated tactics nor that they were directed to target the types of international interests that would advance al-Qaeda's strategic interests, such as furthering the narrative of the West and Christians engaging in a "Crusade" against Muslims, drawing the U.S. to overextend itself in Nigeria, or showing the Muslim world that al-Qaeda was fighting on a global battlefield and was capable of retaliating for U.S. attacks anywhere in the world. For Shekau, this may have been ideal—no one questioned or rivaled his leadership in northeastern Nigeria—but the growing risk in reputation from Shekau's targeting of civilians and his exclusive focus on the "near enemy" made him a potential liability for AQIM.

The JAS AQIM Faction

The JAS AQIM faction differed from the Shekau faction in that it carried out almost of all its attacks along the Muslim-Christian "fault line" in Nigeria's Middle Belt region. Moreover, a significant proportion of these attacks were suicide bombings. Of the 36 suicide attacks in Nigeria from June 2011 until the end of 2012, 28 were in the JAS AQIM faction's AO, and only four were in the Shekau faction's AO (another four were in the mutual AO in Kano), even though there were nearly five times the attacks in the JAS Shekau faction's AO (289 Shekau faction attacks vs. 59 AQIM faction attacks). Thus, the specialty of the JAS AQIM faction was suicide bombings, with these attacks comprising more than 50% of its overall attacks compared to 1% of the overall attacks of the JAS Shekau faction.

Moreover, of the 20 suicide car bombings in the JAS AQIM faction's AO in 2012, 11 targeted churches, including seven in Kaduna and three on Easter week in Kaduna in 2012. The other nine suicide car bombings tended to target government buildings or media that the JAS spokesman claimed were

reporting negatively about Islam. There were no “urban invasion” or attacks with dozens of fighters that were likely to cause mass civilian casualties beyond the immediate targets such as Christian worshippers or government officials.

These JAS AQIM faction suicide attacks generated significant national and international attention. They involved a high level of sophistication in designing the suicide bombs and deploying them at relatively hard targets.⁸² These attacks bore many of the “signatures” of AQIM—as promised by Abdul Wadud in 2010—in that they targeted churches, especially on holidays such as Easter, and high-profile targets, such as the Federal Police building and UN Headquarters in Abuja, while also seeking to avoid Muslim civilian casualties. The goal was not *quantity*, or frequency, as with the attacks in the JAS Shekau faction’s AO, but *quality*, as determined by al-Qaeda strategy. This can be explained by the fact that the key militants involved in those attacks had direct ties to AQIM. In contrast, the JAS Shekau faction, including Shekau and his closest commanders, stayed in northeastern Nigeria after July 2009 and were mostly indirect recipients of such support.

Below are four examples of attacks by the JAS AQIM faction in 2011 and 2012, which also shed light on the profiles of key militants.

- December 24, 2010, saw the first major bombing in Nigeria in Jos, Plateau State. It involved four simultaneous explosions plus one designed to explode once the rescue team came to save the wounded—a typical al-Qaeda tactic that had not been executed in Nigeria before—and was claimed by JAS.
- On June 16, 2011, a suicide car bomb exploded at the Federal Police building in Abuja—the first suicide bombing in the country’s history—killing three people. JAS had warned about the attack two days beforehand and said, “We want to make it known that our jihadists arrived in Nigeria from Somalia, where they received real training on warfare from our brethren who made that country ungovernable.” JAS member Abu Fatima claimed the attack and said the purpose was to “show that actions speak louder than words.”⁸³
- On August 26, 2011, a suicide car bomb exploded at the UN Headquarters, killing 23 people. The mastermind behind it was Mamman Nur, who was Yusuf’s third-in-command and had trained with AQIM and al-Shabab after the July 2009 clashes. He received support in the

operation from Abu Fatima and Adam Kamar, although the Shekau faction, which provided the car bomber, claimed the attack in a video with a voiceover of Shekau saying “The UN is the forum of all global evil.”⁸⁴ This attack was the culmination of Ibrahim Harun’s long-standing ambition to target the U.S. or other diplomatic facilities in Abuja (there was a U.S. office in the headquarters).

- On December 25, 2011, Muhammed Yusuf’s former representative for Sokoto State, Kabiru Sokoto, masterminded the bombing of a church outside of Abuja, killing more than 20 worshippers. Sokoto was arrested in January 2012 in the lodge of the Borno State governor in Abuja, but escaped custody. He was re-arrested in Taraba State near the Cameroonian border one month later, when intelligence agents tracked his call to Shekau’s spokesman, Abu Qaqa. In his trial, Kabiru Sokoto confessed that his funding came “the group from the sunset” in Algeria and that he reported not to Shekau but to the “Shura” in Kaduna under Abu Muhammed.⁸⁵ Abu Muhammed was a former trainee of Khalid al-Barnawi and Adam Kamar at an AQIM camp in the Sahel and one of the two militants who accompanied al-Barnawi to meet with Abu Zeid after Yusuf’s death.

A closer look at these individuals shows that they were all connected to AQIM in a more direct way than Shekau (or Shekau’s closest commanders) and they tended to employ different tactics, techniques, and procedures than the JAS Shekau faction. Moreover, as evidenced by Kabiru Sokoto, although they operated under the umbrella of JAS and did not reject Shekau’s leadership, they distanced themselves geographically from the JAS Shekau faction, operated outside of northeastern Nigeria, and focused their attacks on “far enemy” targets around Abuja and the Middle Belt that minimized Muslim civilian casualties. In order to preserve unity, they did not defect from JAS and thus allowed Shekau and his spokesmen to take credit for their attacks. This gave the impression that JAS was one entity when, in fact, the JAS AQIM faction was largely operationally—and increasingly ideologically—distinct from the Shekau faction.

In summary, direct ties to AQIM can be seen in the following:

- Mamman Nur trained with al-Shabab and AQIM and disagreed with Shekau’s killing of civilians;

- Adam Kamar was arrested for training with the GSPC when he was a Nigerian Taliban member and then became the JAS-AQIM intermediary in Niger and had contact with Ayman al-Zawahiri and al-Shabab;
- Abu Muhammed trained in an AQIM camp under Khalid al-Barnawi and Kamar and was with Khalid al-Barnawi when Shekau sent them to meet Abu Zeid after Muhammed Yusuf's death;
- Kabiru Sokoto may not have met with AQIM, but he reported to Abu Muhammed and was in contact with Shekau's spokesman, Abu Qaqa, who, like other members in the JAS AQIM faction, opposed Shekau's acceptance of Muslim civilian deaths and fled from Borno State to Kaduna State in 2012;⁸⁶
- Abu Fatima was a member of the JAS AQIM faction (and later joined Ansaru, which suggests that he must have opposed Shekau's killing of civilians, as that was Ansaru's main complaint against Shekau). He received training in bomb-making, perhaps with AQIM or from the fighters who he said "arrived from Somalia," since he would become a commander of suicide bombings for Ansaru. His claim about militants who "arrived from Somalia" was verified not only by Nur's and Kamar's close contact with Abu Fatima and their contacts to al-Shabab (and AQIM), but also by the arrests of two militants several days before the Nur-masterminded UN building attack. One of the two militants had trained in Somalia with al-Shabab; the other had been arrested with Kamar in 2006 on charges of training with the GSPC but, like Kamar, was released.⁸⁷ Moreover, Abu Fatima and Nur would later become close allies, and together they would oppose Shekau's killing of civilians in West Africa Province.

As is clear, although the JAS AQIM faction attacks were more sporadic than those of the JAS Shekau faction, their impact was consistent with AQIM's overall goals. This left AQIM with a conundrum: the JAS Shekau faction had the manpower to engage in a large-scale insurgency but did not show a willingness to adopt AQIM targeting preferences, while the JAS AQIM faction was capable of carrying out terrorist attacks consistent with AQIM's targeting preferences but lacked the manpower to support an insurgency. Moreover, since Shekau established himself as the sole JAS leader and was willing to kill anyone who criticized him or defected,

including even from his own faction to the JAS AQIM faction, AQIM had little leverage to influence JAS at the leadership level. The successes of the JAS AQIM faction, such as the suicide attack at the UN building, were offset by the risks of JAS being seen as a jihadist movement that excessively targeted civilians, just like the GIA.

AQIM would ultimately prioritize its brand reputation over its potential to expand the insurgency with a JAS that had Shekau at the helm. It supported the emergence of a new faction—Ansaru—that pulled in some elements of the JAS AQIM faction. But this came with the inherent risk of Ansaru being too small in membership, too marginal in the context of the wider insurgency, and too pressured from Shekau to have the impact AQIM needed to sustain a jihadist movement in Nigeria.

Ansaru

Ansaru emerged at first not so much as an ideological counterweight to JAS but out of the different operational preferences of Khalid al-Barnawi and Shekau. A member of proto-al-Qaeda since the 1990s in Sudan and then with al-Shabab and AQIM (and their predecessors) in the 2000s, Khalid al-Barnawi had a distinct focus on “far enemy” targets, especially kidnappings.⁸⁸ Thus, when he received the \$250,000 from AQIM after the meeting with Abu Zeid in August 2009, he transferred it to Abu Muhammed, who set up a base in Nigeria’s Kaduna State. (Al-Barnawi moved between Nigeria and the Sahel.)

As a militant with direct ties to AQIM, Abu Muhammed was naturally an ally of the JAS AQIM faction, as evidenced by his role in directing Kabiru Sokoto in the Christmas 2011 church bombing. While Shekau condoned but did not order the JAS AQIM faction attacks, Abu Muhammed also ventured into a tactical area that Shekau explicitly rejected: kidnappings-for-ransom of foreigners. This was the tactic that AQIM had intended for JAS to carry out with its initial \$250,000 investment given to Khalid al-Barnawi. It was in this context that the first kidnapping operation that Khalid al-Barnawi masterminded with Abu Muhammed led to not merely a factional split but opened an *organizational split* with Shekau.

This first kidnapping-for-ransom operation occurred when a cell directed by Abu Muhammed kidnapped a British and an Italian engineer from their

apartment in Kebbi State in May 2011, taking them to a hideout in neighboring Sokoto State. Just as the JAS AQIM faction carried out the first suicide attack in Nigerian history, this was the first major kidnapping-for-ransom of foreigners in northern Nigeria.⁸⁹ (Southern Nigeria, in contrast, often saw economically motivated kidnappings of oil workers.) Although suspicion fell on JAS, Shekau's spokesman, Abu Qaqa, called allegations of JAS involvement "ridiculous" and said, "We have never been involved in hostage-taking and it is not part of our style, and we never ask for ransom."⁹⁰

A new group called al-Qaeda in the Lands Beyond the Sahel (AQLBS) claimed the kidnapping in a proof-of-life video showing the two hostages blindfolded and kneeling in front of three veiled militants wearing Sahelian clothing typical of AQIM militants. The video was sent to Mauritania's Agence Nouakchott d'information, which commonly received AQIM hostage videos, and the hostage-takers contacted the same Burkina Faso-based Mauritanian negotiator that AQIM used in several previous kidnappings. They demanded \$6 million and the release of jihadist prisoners in West Africa for the two hostages, which was also consistent with AQIM's typical demands. The realization of this kidnapping reflected the vision of AQIM to expand its zone of operations "throughout the entire Sahara," even though at first analysts doubted whether it was truly an al-Qaeda operation and not just "ordinary criminals."⁹¹

The two hostages ultimately were killed in a rescue attempt in March 2012, one day after a raid of Abu Muhammed's base in Kaduna that killed Muhammed and provided intelligence leading the security forces to the hideout in Sokoto State. Intelligence from the raid also led the security forces to a hideout in Kano, where a German engineer, who was kidnapped on January 26, 2012, was being held. This kidnapping was claimed by AQIM—not AQLBS—because Adam Kamar had masterminded the operation and informed Abu Zeid and AQIM leadership about it beforehand. In the kidnapping in Kebbi-Sokoto, Khalid al-Barnawi operated with Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who was part of AQIM but separate from its leadership hierarchy.

In AQIM's claim of the kidnapping in Kano, it demanded Germany release Filiz Gelowicz from prison in Germany. She was the Turkey-born

wife of a German convert to Islam, who fought for the Taliban in Afghanistan and was arrested in 2007 in Germany for planning to bomb Ramstein Air Base on orders from the Yunus al-Mauritani-led al-Qaeda's External Operations Unit—the same unit to which Ibrahim Harun belonged. This demand came at a time when al-Qaeda was engaging in a global messaging campaign to free female prisoners, including Filiz Gelowicz, and showed that AQIM was now capable of extending al-Qaeda's narratives and the “global battlefield” to Nigeria, which had been part of the original strategy for Nigeria. AQIM also reminded Germany to avoid the “recent lesson taught to the UK by the *mujahidin*,” referring to UK special forces, which assisted Nigerian security forces in the failed rescue attempt of the British and Italian hostages in Sokoto.⁹² Although Germany did release Filiz Gelowicz early, the German engineer was not released. He was killed in a rescue attempt in May 2012 along with his captors, two of whom were Mauritanian AQIM members.⁹³

Although these kidnappings in Kebbi-Sokoto and Kano in the names of AQLBS and AQIM were not claimed by Ansaru, their tie to Khalid al-Barnawi, Adam Kamar, and Abu Muhammed shows they were part of the group that would in 2012 call itself Ansaru. Moreover, the two kidnappings showed that elements of the JAS AQIM faction, especially Abu Muhammed, were increasingly moving away from the JAS umbrella, toward a new organizational structure. Ansaru would not only carry out operations that were geographically and tactically distinct from the JAS Shekau faction but also call out JAS for its indiscriminate violence.

Ansaru officially announced its formation in fliers dropped in Kano on January 26, 2012—the same day the German engineer was kidnapped and one week after the Shekau-claimed “urban invasion” attack in Kano. The fliers said Ansaru was a “humane” alternative to JAS and sought to revive the caliphate of Usman dan Fodio—the Fulani jihadist who established a caliphate in the northwestern Nigeria in the 1800s.⁹⁴ Videos in June 2012 showed that Ansaru disapproved of Shekau's killing of Muslims, including Ansaru defectors from JAS (although Ansaru did not mention Shekau specifically by name),⁹⁵ and that it bore some of legacies of the GSPC, such as including a logo modeled on GSPC (and Algeria's national emblem), its use of Arabic, and its fighters' tendency to wear Sahelian attire in its visual

propaganda. Like AQIM leader Abdul Wadud's 2010 threats, Ansaru also specifically promised revenge for Christian "atrocities" against Muslims in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

Al-Qaeda explained five years later in a January 2017 article that JAS had elected Shekau as *amir* (ruler) of their *jamaah* (group) after Muhammed Yusuf's death in 2009.⁹⁶ However, they saw how Shekau declared anyone who was not part of their *jamaah* as apostates, including ordinary Muslims who neither joined nor opposed JAS: this was tantamount to the same declaration of *takfir* that the GIA had declared on Algerians during that country's civil war in the 1990s. As a result, the militants who formed Ansaru, including Khalid al-Barnawi, consulted their "Algerian brothers," separated from Shekau, and chose the name Ansaru. Removing "al-Qaeda" from their name was likely in response to bin Laden and later AQIM directives for al-Qaeda affiliates and allies to disguise their "jihadist intentions" and appear as local or "nationalist" movements to reduce international counterterrorism attention on them. Ansaru's membership thus came from Nigerian AQIM members who returned to Nigeria, such as Khalid al-Barnawi, Adam Kamar, and Abu Muhammed; Nigerians recruited abroad, such as in Islamic universities in Sudan who trained with Abu Zeid or Belmokhtar and were then deployed to Nigeria; and defectors from JAS, such as Shekau's spokesman, Abu Qaqa, and Abu Fatima, who became Ansaru commander for suicide operations.

After a series of statements and videos, the group claimed its first operation under "Ansaru" in November 26, 2012, when its militants broke into a prison in Abuja, freed several dozen prisoners, and issued a YouTube video with a popular Arabic jihadist *nasheed* claiming the attack.⁹⁷ Ansaru claimed its second operation on December 19, 2012, when 30 militants kidnapped a French engineer from a town in Katsina State in northwestern Nigeria near the border with Niger. Ansaru said it would continue to kidnap French citizens until France ended its ban on the *hijab* for women and abandoned its then imminent plans to intervene militarily in northern Mali to oust AQIM and its allies, who were controlling northern Mali. The Frenchman escaped custody after being moved to Kaduna State in November 2013, several weeks after Ansaru showed a proof-of-life video of him on a jihadist website.⁹⁸

Ansaru's kidnapping victims after the French engineer were not as fortunate. On February 16, 2013, Ansaru kidnapped seven foreign engineers from a construction site in Bauchi State—its first operation in the JAS Shekau faction AO. Before Ansaru killed the seven engineers several weeks later, it warned that any attempt to rescue the hostages would lead to the same result as in the Kebbi-Sokoto and Kano kidnappings (claimed by AQLBS and AQIM) and said the kidnapping was in response to European “atrocities” in Afghanistan and Mali. In the video Ansaru released of the dead Baluchi captives, a militant voiceover said the group killed the “seven Christian foreigners” due to Nigerian media reports that UK and Nigerians forces were preparing a rescue mission.⁹⁹ Both the theme of the *hijab* in France and the focus on Afghanistan and Mali, as well as Ansaru's use of Arabic as its main language communication, reflected broader al-Qaeda and AQIM messaging, unlike Shekau's more Nigeria-centric messages at this time.

In addition to these kidnappings and the prison break, Ansaru also claimed an ambush in south of Abuja in Kogi State on Nigerian troops who were preparing for deployment to Mali, killing two soldiers. Ansaru said the troops “were aiming to demolish the Islamic Empire of Mali” and warned African countries to “stop helping Western countries fight Muslims.”¹⁰⁰ Again, this claim fit al-Qaeda “global narratives” but appealed less to specific Nigerian concerns.

Beyond Nigeria, Ansaru members were active in northern Mali, which came under the control of AQIM and allied groups in April 2012. Mokhtar Belmokhtar's al-Murabitun and MUJWA, for example, featured an Ansaru member in their joint claim of suicide attacks on French energy plants in May 2013 in Arlit and Agadez, Niger, which they said were in retaliation for French-led intervention in northern Mali.¹⁰¹ In addition, after Belmokhtar fled northern Mali in early 2013, an Ansaru propaganda flier was found in his home, suggesting a role for him in hosting Ansaru members and designing Ansaru propaganda in the town of Gao, northern Mali. This might account for the similarity between the themes of Ansaru's claims and Belmokhtar's and MUJWA's claims.¹⁰² AQIM ideologues, such as Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti, who had been the mentor of some Ansaru members during their training in his native Mauritania, also condemned

some of JAS's attacks (without mentioning Shekau or JAS by name), such as JAS's series of killings of students in their classes or dormitories instead of burning down the school facilities after hours or warning their parents, which al-Shinqiti suggested could achieve the same result with less harm to the image of jihadists.¹⁰³ Indeed, al-Qaeda's overall strategy by the time of al-Shinqiti's statement in July 2013 was to avoid the perception of killing Muslims, which was consistent with al-Shinqiti's and Ansaru's messaging—but not Shekau's.

While AQIM benefitted from the JAS AQIM faction and had an even more direct tie to Ansaru, both groups still lacked manpower compared to the JAS Shekau faction. Indeed, if it was the July 2009 clashes that motivated many JAS fighters to take up jihad, then it was Shekau's consistent demands for revenge against the Nigerian government and its alleged collaborators, including Muslims who participated in democracy, Christians, and the West, that kept them motivated. The JAS AQIM faction leaders and Ansaru leaders, who had spent years abroad before the clashes July 2009 or trained abroad in their immediate aftermath, had less resonance than Shekau, even given his histrionics. Shekau's bombast and use of Kanuri as well as Hausa and Arabic (and English or French when mocking the West) appealed to the "small boys" of northeastern Nigeria who saw Shekau as a "small boy" who grew important enough to have the "U.S. president calling him by name," according to Nigeria's former director of behavior analysis in its CVE program.¹⁰⁴

There appeared to be nothing AQIM could do to overcome Shekau, except continue reinforcing Ansaru and the JAS AQIM faction. But once AQIM itself came under pressure in northern Mali, it was forced to abandon its investment in Nigeria altogether. This would show that AQIM made the wrong wager in the short term, especially as the same members of Ansaru and the JAS AQIM faction in which AQIM invested fell into Shekau's orbit and a new investor—Islamic State—came along to swallow them. But would AQIM's disciplined commitment to staying away from Shekau's *takfirism* prove wise in the long term? The next section discusses the short- and long-term effects of AQIM's loss of its investment in Nigeria.

Discussion Questions

1. What explains AQIM's mixed support for the JAS Shekau faction attacks?
2. How may Shekau's belief that Muslims who participate in democracy are "apostates" on the same level as Christian "infidels" have led him to have a different targeting strategy and preferences than AQIM (recall the prior discussion on *takfirism* and the GIA)?
3. If Shekau's fighters were mostly Kanuris, how might this have affected the targeting strategy and areas of operations of his faction compared to the JAS AQIM faction, whose members were more likely to have traveled abroad after the July 2009 clashes and been from other Nigerian ethnicities?
4. How did the four attacks profiled above support the overall al-Qaeda strategy for Nigeria?
5. To what extent were the much fewer suicide bombings in the AO of the JAS Shekau faction compared to the JAS AQIM faction related to differences in ideology or levels of training between the two factions?
6. The words "terrorism" and "insurgency" have been used interchangeably, especially in the Nigerian context. To what extent would distinguishing between these terms—and the types of violence seen in 2012 in the areas of operations of the JAS Shekau faction and JAS AQIM faction—become relevant in develop a strategy to counter JAS?
7. How do the different backgrounds of Khalid al-Barnawi and Shekau reflect their "near enemy" vs. "far enemy" approaches?
8. What does AQIM's relationship to both JAS factions and Ansaru suggest about the potential risks, or difficulties, in al-Qaeda's expansion into Nigeria or any other country? What was the role of AQIM and other outside actors in the evolution of both JAS factions and Ansaru?
9. Did the JAS Shekau faction, the JAS AQIM faction, or Ansaru pose the biggest threat? What metrics would one use to assess this? How does the answer depend on who is assessing the threat, such as the Nigerian government, an international NGO or company, or the U.S. government?

Notes

78. "More Than 700 Inmates Escape During Attack on Nigerian Prison," *The Guardian*, September 8, 2010.
79. "Cracks in Boko Haram Camp as Faction Condemns Bomb Attacks," *odili.net*, July 21, 2011, available at: <http://www.odili.net/news/source/2011/jul/21/16.html>.
80. The statement was posted on Al-Minbar forum #16019 (accessed 2012).
81. "Al-Janîh Lillah" (user number 100612), *Shmukh al-Islam Forum* (accessed 2012).
82. Churches were increasingly guarded by security officers after the first few suicide attacks. Moreover, as Kaduna and the Middle Belt more generally surrounds the capital of Abuja, there is a stronger security presence than in remote regions of the country, such as Borno or Yobe, so there was a lower margin for error for operatives in the JAS AQIM faction area of operations.
83. JAS also released the will and photo of the attacker, and said that the attacker used a ready-made bomb imported from abroad "and we are going to use several of them in future attacks." Ahmmed Salkida, "The Story Of Nigeria's First Suicide Bomber-Blueprint Magazine," *Sahara Reporters*, June 26, 2011, available at: <http://saharareporters.com/2011/06/26/story-nigerias-first-suicide-bomber-blueprint-magazine>; "Police Headquarters Bombing: IG Had Meeting With Bomber," available at: [Pointblanknews](http://Pointblanknews.com), June 17, 2011, available at: <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/54135/police-headquarters-bombing-ig-had-meeting-with-bomber.html>.
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From AQIM to ISIS

“We took the barracks and we control all of the town of Konna!”

Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s brother-in-law and leader of MUJWA, Oumar Ould Hamaha, told reporters on January 10, 2013.¹⁰⁵ Militants in MUJWA under the command of the ethnically Fulani jihadist Hamadou Kufa took control of the central Malian town of Konna, which was the gateway to southern Mali. Fears grew that MUJWA could now make a push for Bamako, Mali’s capital.

The rebel plan for Konna was a mastery of deceit. At the checkpoint for vehicles entering the city, 20 militants dressed in civilian clothing acted as if they were passengers. When a soldier went inside the bus to inspect their documents, they pulled out their guns, shot the soldier, and shot the other soldiers manning the checkpoint. Hundreds of MUJWA, AQIM, and Ansar Dine fighters then stormed into the town and captured it.

France was already preparing to oust AQIM, Ansar Dine, and MUJWA from their strongholds in northern Mali, but once the militants entered Konna, the French expedited the intervention, which was code-named Operation Serval. Starting in February 2013, French forces ousted the jihadists from northern Mali within weeks. Supported by Chadian special forces in remote regions, they killed Abu Zeid and Oumar Ould Hamaha and forced Belmokhtar and the remainder of Abu Zeid’s forces to retreat toward the Libya-Tunisia border. MUJWA members also dispersed in northern Mali and neighboring countries, while Ansar Dine retreated into the hinterlands of northern Mali to plan for long-term guerilla warfare.

But the ouster of AQIM and its allies from northern Mali, which they had occupied since early 2012, disrupted the network of secret hideouts, logistics bases, and training camps that AQIM had developed over the course of a decade of its expansion into the Sahel. For the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru, this had significant implications: what would the JAS AQIM fac-

tion and Ansaru do now that their key couriers to AQIM had been killed or arrested? Could Ansaru survive while AQIM was on the run, especially in the face of Shekau's crackdown on Ansaru members in Nigeria? Could the JAS AQIM faction maintain its pace of suicide bombings without AQIM tactical support and guidance, let alone funding and training? And what would this mean for Shekau, who was the least dependent on AQIM of all Nigerian groups and factions—could this even be a boon for him?

One month after the capture of Konna and the start of Operation Serval, in March 2013, a new tactic appeared in northeastern Nigeria in the JAS Shekau faction area of operations. For the first time, militants raided a military barracks in Monguno, Borno State—a natural entry point for militants from Mali. Although they were repelled, according to a video the militants released, they were able to pilfer weapons. There was something else new about these militants: they claimed neither to be JAS nor Ansaru nor any previously known militant group. The leader said the group name was Nassiruddeen Li Ahlil jihad Alal Kitab Was Sunna (Islamic Victors Committed to the Qur'an and Sunna). They wore green camouflage uniforms and spoke Hausa like JAS, but wore veils like Ansaru, and used an attack strategy using convoys of improvised 4×4s common to the desert warfare of Mali. Moreover, the leader's speech centered on fighting not in the name of any "tribe or clan, but to impose Islam on unbelievers": the first part of this slogan was common to the AQIM militants in Mali, who sought to overcome tribal differences to become the overlords of the insurgency there; and the second part was common to Shekau. Could AQIM or Ansaru militants who fled Mali have combined with Ansaru and JAS to launch this attack? Was this a sign of things to come?

Statistically, there were key differences between the militancy in Nigeria before and after Operation Serval. In 2013, there were 160 attacks in the JAS Shekau faction AO and only 10 in the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru AO, which was a decrease from 289 and 59 attacks, respectively, in 2012. In 2013, there were also 35 attacks in Kano, the mutual area of operations, which was a decrease from 79 in 2012. Moreover, there were only two suicide operations in all of 2013 in Nigeria—a sharp reduction from the 29 suicide operations in 2012. Of course, the downturn in attacks in Nigeria could be attributed to other factors beyond Operation Serval, such

as a state of emergency military offensive that the Nigerian government declared in May 2013, as well as the arrests and deaths of key leaders in the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru in Nigeria throughout 2012.

But the following section discusses several reasons why the second-order effects of Operation Serval mattered for Nigeria and suggests that the new tactics and alliances emerging between the JAS Shekau faction and JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru specifically in February 2013 were not coincidentally simultaneous with the outflow resulting from Operation Serval. The discussion shows how the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru re-integrated with the JAS Shekau faction in part because the former two entities no longer had a connection to AQIM and could best survive by allying with Shekau. This meant that AQIM lost virtually all of what it had “invested” in Nigeria.

Even worse for AQIM, and for al-Qaeda more broadly, the newly reunited JAS under Shekau was courted by al-Qaeda's rival, Islamic State, which showed little concern—even showing admiration — for Shekau's violence. JAS would pledge loyalty to Islamic State and thus become its West Africa Province. But if AQIM's investment was for the long term, perhaps it is still well situated to be able to overcome this short-term setback and win a defection by West Africa Province—minus Shekau—back to al-Qaeda and, of course, under a new name brand. This could make al-Qaeda even stronger in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. Exploring that scenario is the topic that will conclude this case study.

The JAS Shekau Faction Wins Out

One of the main effects of Operation Serval was that it severed the connections between AQIM, the JAS AQIM faction, and Ansaru because of the deaths or arrests of the key couriers between them.¹⁰⁶ This occurred on top of several actions by Nigerian counter-terrorism forces: arresting Kabiru Sokoto in January 2012; raiding Abu Muhammed's base in Kaduna and killing him and others in his *shura* in March 2012 (and arresting members of the Kebbi-Sokoto cell the day after in the failed rescue attempt of the Italian and British hostages); killing members of the Kano cell that kidnapped the German engineer in May 2012; and killing Adam Kam-

bar in Kano in August 2012 after an operative in the UN building attack informed on his location. Further, the JAS Shekau faction killed several key Ansaru operatives for defecting and also killed Ansaru's spiritual leader. AQIM itself dispersed throughout North Africa, leaving the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru to fend for themselves in Nigeria.

AQIM's ability to control affairs in Nigeria was somewhat tenuous even months before Operation Serval was underway. In late 2012, Khalid al-Barnawi engaged in a reconciliation attempt with Shekau under the auspices of AQIM (likely MUJWA or Ansar Dine, to be specific) in Mali.¹⁰⁷ The parameters were that Shekau would appoint al-Barnawi's followers to leadership positions and allow al-Barnawi to relocate some former Ansaru militants to Borno State, especially to the border region between Borno State and Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. This was under the condition that they coordinated any operations, including kidnappings, which Shekau would now accept, under the banner of JAS and in Shekau's name.¹⁰⁸ Maman Nur and Abu Fatima would later join JAS under Shekau's leadership, as did Muhammed Yusuf's son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi (real name Habib Yusuf), rather than be marginalized from the insurgency altogether. The first public hint at such a reconciliation came in Shekau's November 29, 2012 video from Mali in which he praised the "Soldiers of Allah in the Islamic State in Mali," while the video's opening narration praised Ansaru's prison break in Abuja three days earlier.¹⁰⁹

Operationally, the reconciliation became apparent in February 2013, when the tactic of kidnappings-of-foreigners for ransom entered the JAS Shekau faction's AO for the first time, specifically in northern Cameroon. (Perhaps this was to separate al-Barnawi's fighters from Shekau as part of the reconciliation.) From February 2013 until July 2014, there were five separate kidnappings in northern Cameroon involving 22 foreigners that won for JAS over \$10 million and several dozen prisoners in hostage exchanges.¹¹⁰

These kidnappings were as follows:

- The first kidnapping, in February 2013, was of a French engineer and six members of his family, including three children. They were based in Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital, but on safari in Waza, northern Cameroon. The first proof-of-life video of the family posted on YouTube

featured an incorrect JAS logo on a flag and no JAS video branding, although the captors said they were JAS members and used certain distinct JAS introductory phrases. The captors also spoke in Arabic—a language typical of Ansaru, due to its exposure in North Africa—and said the kidnapping was revenge for France's "war on Islam in Mali," another distinctly Ansaru theme. The family was later transferred to JAS across the border in Borno State, where they were released after JAS made two hostage videos with formal JAS branding, including one with Shekau and the family in split-screen. This suggested the kidnapping may have been a hybrid operation, with former Ansaru members capturing the family and transferring them to the JAS Shekau faction in Borno State.

- The next kidnapping, of a French priest, took place in northern Cameroon in November 2013 and was jointly claimed by Ansaru and JAS.¹¹¹ JAS later released the priest on what it called "humanitarian grounds," which was unusual, considering JAS, unlike Ansaru, had never expressed any type of mercy before. This again suggested the possible involvement of former Ansaru members. Reports said JAS received many millions of dollars for both the French family and the priest.
- If former Ansaru members were involved in the first two kidnappings, it is likely they were also involved in the next three kidnappings of foreigners in northern Cameroon, because the Cameroonian negotiators for JAS in the first two kidnappings were the same as in the third, fourth and fifth kidnappings.¹¹² These next three kidnappings were of two Italian priests and a Canadian nun in April 2014; 10 Chinese engineers in May 2014; and a German aid worker in July 2014 (who was kidnapped Adamawa State, Nigeria but brought to Cameroon).¹¹³ All of the hostages in these three kidnappings were released by JAS for an undisclosed sum of money and JAS prisoners.

The start of this series of kidnappings overlapped with Ansaru's kidnapping of the seven foreign engineers in Bauchi in February 2013. Ansaru took the engineers to the JAS Shekau faction's main base in Sambisa Forest, Borno State (where they were later killed), suggesting Ansaru and the JAS Shekau faction had begun to share the same area of operations. Even before the Bauchi kidnapping, Ansaru operations had been gradually moving from northwestern Nigeria to northeastern Nigeria.¹¹⁴

If former Ansaru members were involved in the five kidnappings in northern Cameroon, it is likely they also were behind the sudden emergence of kidnappings-for-ransom of Nigerian elites in Borno State and of other Cameroonians in northern Cameroon. These began in February 2013 after not being part of the JAS attack repertoire in either country prior to that date. In what Nigerian security forces attributed to JAS's new "special kidnapping squad," kidnappings-for-ransom of Nigerian elites became a common tactic, particularly on the borderlands of Borno State. This netted JAS from \$10,000 to \$300,000 per hostage exchange in several dozen operations after February 2013.¹¹⁵

Even if Khalid al-Barnawi's motivation for allying with Shekau was the need for survival after setbacks in northwestern Nigeria, if he or AQIM thought they could control Shekau's violence, they were wrong. While JAS kidnappings, suicide bombings, narratives, and barracks raids all improved after the unification, in each case they went haywire under Shekau's leadership.

For example, the Chibok kidnapping can be seen in the context of Khalid al-Barnawi introducing kidnapping expertise to JAS—although, given his al-Qaeda pedigree, it appears he abandoned JAS and returned to Ansaru either before or at the time of the Chibok kidnapping. Other former JAS AQIM faction members, such as Mamman Nur and Abu Fatima, remained with Shekau in the interest of unity (and from lack of other options with AQIM on the run in northern Mali), despite their disapproval of kidnappings of, in particular, Muslims "apostates" who allegedly were guilty of participating in democracy. This issue would later cause them to split again from Shekau.

Suicide bombings in northeastern Nigeria were also a reflection of tactical influence from Ansaru and the JAS AQIM faction. One probable contributor to this was former AQIM faction and Ansaru suicide bombing expert, Abu Fatima, who was involved in the first two suicide bombings at the Federal Police headquarters and UN building and rejoined JAS. While the Shekau faction had conducted several suicide bombings in 2012, they were never a major part of its repertoire in the way that they dominated the AQIM faction's operations.

But in 2014, 17 of 29 suicide bombings were in JAS's area of operations in northeastern Nigeria, while eight were in the mutual area of operations in Kano and only four were in the former JAS AQIM faction AO. Shekau claimed several of the suicide bombings, such as Kano's Grand Mosque in November 2014, which Ansaru condemned because it killed Muslims. The trend of the shift suicide bombings to the JAS AO continued in 2015, when of 119 suicide bombings in Nigeria that year, 113 were in JAS's area of operations, including Cameroon, Chad, and Niger with 17, 11, and four attacks, respectively. There were, in contrast, only two suicide attacks in the former Ansaru and JAS AQIM faction area of operations and four suicide attacks in Kano in 2015. In 2016, the trend continued, with all 74 suicide attacks in JAS's AO, including 40 suicide attacks in Borno State and 27 suicide attacks in Cameroon. The clear trend was that the tactic of suicide bombing and the expertise in it completely shifted from northwestern Nigeria to the JAS Shekau faction's AO. But where this tactic went haywire was on the issue of female suicide bombings. They are rejected in al-Qaeda ideology and practice.¹¹⁶ The only al-Qaeda leader to use female suicide bombings *en masse* was al-Zarqawi with AQI, and it was this tactic among his killings of civilians that began his break with al-Qaeda and led his successors on the road to becoming Islamic State.¹¹⁷

Female suicide bombings began in Nigeria in June 2014—one month after Shekau's claim of the Chibok kidnapping, although no Chibok girls were used in such operations—with a series of about 10 attacks in the former JAS AQIM faction area of operations in mid-2014. However, the second such attack was so far south as to target a petrol tanker in Lagos after Shekau promised to attack that city. Shekau claimed the attack without specifying that it was carried it out by a woman, as images of the attacker's corpse later showed.¹¹⁸ However, by 2015 and 2016, almost all female suicide attacks in Nigeria—54 and 53, respectively, an unprecedented amount in terrorist history—were in the JAS AO in northeastern Nigeria. This suggests that pro-JAS-leaning “hardline” former elements of Ansaru, such as Abu Fatima, brought this tactic to JAS as they separated themselves from Ansaru's al-Qaeda orientation both ideologically and operationally.

Beyond operations, another reflection of Ansaru's influence on JAS was that JAS narratives, starting in 2014, began to take on a more historical

and pan-African approach like that of Ansaru (as well as AQIM, MUJWA, and Ansar Dine).¹¹⁹ This included newfound JAS references to Usman dan Fodio's legacy, beginning with Shekau's claim of the Chibok kidnapping that May and JAS claiming to establish an "Islamic State in *biladis Sudan*" (the latter part of Ansaru's full name). When Abu Musab al-Barnawi became the JAS spokesman in early 2015, he declared that civilians who "repent" and did not take up arms against JAS would be spared,¹²⁰ reflecting Ansaru or former JAS Shekau faction influence on JAS. Even though Shekau adopted some Ansaru themes, such as Usman dan Fodio's legacy, which may have been the result of former Ansaru members writing his "scripts," there was, in fact, hybrid messaging in JAS after the unification. Shekau mostly continued glorifying brutality and civilian deaths, while some other JAS videos showed a more "humane" aspect, as if there were two media teams: Shekau's; and one of former Ansaru and JAS AQIM faction members. Nonetheless, this "Jekyll and Hyde" persona of JAS was still beyond the pale for al-Qaeda-style image management to not be seen as ever killing innocent Muslims.

As discussed below, it was the March 2013 raids of military barracks in Monguno, Borno State that represented the apex of JAS's power after the integration of former Ansaru, JAS AQIM faction, and Mali-based militants with the Shekau faction. This empowered Shekau unlike ever before. But it was the control of territory after over-running military barracks in northeastern Nigeria that made theoretical concerns about Shekau's *takfirism* become highly practical. While AQIM could claim some credit for JAS's "successes"—as Abu Yayhya al-Libi had done years earlier—it was in no place to condone many of the group's tactics under Shekau. By the time of the Chibok kidnapping in April 2014, AQIM had largely divested itself of the "Frankenstein" it helped create.

Creating the Caliphate

With former Ansaru and JAS AQIM faction members now unified in JAS under Shekau's leadership, an empowered JAS began creating the conditions for Shekau's declaration of *an* Islamic State (not *the* Islamic State) in northeastern Nigeria.¹²¹ From April to October 2013, JAS raided military barracks or destroyed towns in Borno State, causing massive civilian casualties, including 127 dead in Damatru, 142 in Benisheikh, 55 in Bama, 44 in

Konduga, 41 in Gujba, and 35 in Demba. These attacks coincided with the above-mentioned suicide bombing campaign, including dozens of women and girls, and the kidnapping-for-random operations in Borno State and northern Cameroon.

In March 2014, JAS—now largely in control of the countryside in Borno State—organized an attack on the Giwa (“elephant” in Hausa) military barracks in Borno State’s capital, Maiduguri, and freed hundreds of prisoners. JAS showed the operation in a Shekau-claimed propaganda video where he bombastically called Giwa barracks the “pig’s barracks” and hinted that the “revival of slavery” was to come: “You should all abandon the university. I totally detest the university. Bastards [Boys]! You should leave the university. Western education is forbidden. Girls! You should all go back to your various houses. Enslaving the unbelievers’ women is permissible. In the future, we will capture the women and sell them in the market.”¹²² These raids effectively caused the Nigerian military to abandon large swaths of the countryside in Borno State and parts of neighboring Yobe State and Adamawa State, while showing that not even Maiduguri was secure. This enabled JAS to carry out the Chibok kidnapping because the military had left the countryside unprotected.

While JAS was rising in power to unprecedented levels, AQIM was focusing on regenerating its insurgency in rural areas of northern Mali and establishing front groups and sub-affiliates in Tunisia and Libya, including with remnants of the brigade of the now deceased Abu Zeid. AQIM had little leverage over, and increasingly less interest in, events in Nigeria, even though it still included Shekau on communications. Shekau was, for example, informed by the leader of AQIM’s Tunisian affiliate, Abu Iyad al-Tunisi, as late as July 2014 with al-Baghdadi’s declaration of *the* Islamic that al-Qaeda should join al-Baghdadi to “moderate” him. Al-Qaeda would, however, reject this plan and ultimately decide to challenge al-Baghdadi on ideological grounds, arguing that Islamic State was *khawarij*.¹²³ Al-Tunisi retracted his letter after it was leaked publicly.

But it was new competition from what was still called Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in early 2014 that destroyed the final link between AQIM and Shekau. Shekau evidently agreed with al-Tunisi’s letter, al-

though with no intention of moderating al-Baghdadi. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri ordered ISIS to stay in Iraq and allow al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, to operate in Syria. But al-Baghdadi ignored him and expanded into Syria, declaring the caliphate in July 2014 and renaming ISIS as Islamic State—implying it was a global caliphate to which all jihadist groups must pledge loyalty. Thus, al-Qaeda and Islamic State became two distinct entities. In this context, Islamic State saw JAS's control over large swaths of territory in northeastern Nigeria as valuable for its global expansion (or at least its propaganda), especially since that would mean al-Qaeda would lose an asset in Nigeria.

Unlike al-Qaeda, which sought to integrate JAS into its global network while preserving a brand reputation for respecting civilian lives, Islamic State was most concerned with promoting a brand of *baqiya* and *tatamadad* (“remaining and expanding”). No matter how brutal, violence was a new positive for Islamic State because it gained attention for the newly declared caliphate. Even though such images repulsed the Muslim masses, they also attracted the few select Muslims from around the world who were attracted to such highly stylized displays of brutality. Shekau's violence was thus not problematic for Islamic State, while JAS's *tamkin*, or on-the-ground authority, was extremely valuable for an organization that prided itself on holding territory in a caliphate. (Al-Qaeda, in contrast, cautioned against declarations of an “Islamic State” when its longevity was not assured.)¹²⁴ Most new “provinces” from which Islamic State was able to win loyalty were relatively small al-Qaeda break-offs with no real *tamkin*, while all formal al-Qaeda affiliates such as AQIM, AQAP, and al-Shabab stayed loyal to al-Qaeda. JAS therefore had more *tamkin* than virtually any other prospective “province” that Islamic State could attract.

Witnessing the rise of ISIS and then Islamic State, Shekau embraced al-Baghdadi like he had previously embraced al-Qaeda. Even three months before al-Baghdadi's declaration of the caliphate, Shekau showed his admiration for ISIS in the beginning of his claim of the Chibok kidnapping, for example, chanting an ISIS slogan among his followers, “*dawlat al-Islamiya qamat, dawlat al-Islamiya baqiya*” (“the Islamic State is established, the Islamic State remains”). Islamic State members saw these chants as well as Shekau's imitation of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's style of shooting a gun, his

defense of the “revival of slavery,” and his war call of “Sheka-ka-ka-ka-u” as signs of strength.¹²⁵ Throughout 2014, JAS videos showed the group was inspired by Islamic State. In some cases, JAS videographers collaborated with Islamic State (perhaps remotely) on special effects and symbolism, with Islamic State’s flag, its terminology such as *Sahwa* and “breaking borders,” and its *nasheeds* appearing in JAS videos.¹²⁶ In one video, Shekau even appeared in a mosque in Borno State and gestured in a manner similar to al-Baghdadi, calmly, unlike his typical bombastic style.

As Islamic State sought to formalize the relationship with JAS as a “province” in late 2014, it faced two obstacles. The first was that Islamic State had no direct connection to Shekau but wanted him to be the leader of its new “West Africa Province.” Unity of factions was a requirement for new “provinces,” and Shekau was the most recognizable JAS leader; without a recognizable JAS leader, any pledge would lack credibility. Instead, Islamic State in Syria had lines of communications to its new “provinces” in Libya and supporters in Tunisia, which were comprised of former members of Abu Zeid’s brigade and other AQIM brigades that had defected to Islamic State. These Libya- and Tunisia-based Islamic State members, in turn, had lines of communications with Mamman Nur, who like other former members of Ansaru and the JAS AQIM faction, such as Abu Fatima and Abu Musab al-Barnawi, were now unified with Shekau.¹²⁷ Nur, Fatima, and al-Barnawi were prepared to join Islamic State out of their belief that al-Baghdadi fulfilled the qualifications to be a caliph, including having *tamkin*, being of the prophetic bloodline, and receiving the support of Islamic scholars. The second obstacle for Islamic State, however, was that as much as Shekau showed his admiration for Islamic State, he did not want to be under the authority of another leader, even though he believed al-Baghdadi was a legitimate caliph.

Even though a pledge from Shekau was still uncertain, in January 2015, the AQIM-turned-Islamic State fighters in North Africa set up a Twitter account with al-Barnawi as the spokesman, so that Islamic State could promote JAS before an impending pledge to al-Baghdadi. This was just after a JAS attack in Bama reportedly killed 2,000 people, leading AQIM to terminate relations with JAS. The new Twitter account featured a number of videos, statements, and tweets in typical Islamic State style introducing JAS to Islamic State’s

global followership and hinting at the inevitability of a pledge. It also included some distinctly Ansaru rhetoric, since al-Barnawi was its spokesman and the Shekau faction was not included on the Twitter account. For example, in an introductory video, al-Barnawi said that JAS only killed civilians in Bama who did not “repent.” In contrast, Shekau, who was not yet part of the Twitter account, boasted of killing people in the attack.

In early February 2015, JAS, including Nur, Fatima, al-Barnawi, and Shekau as well as remaining Ansaru members, held a shura that resulted in Nur and Fatima “compelling” Shekau to make a pledge to al-Baghdadi; if he did not, they would break from him and divide the group.¹²⁸ To maintain unity, Shekau agreed to make the pledge. On March 7, 2015, a video of Shekau’s pledge was featured on the Twitter account; on March 12, 2015 al-Baghdadi via his spokesman accepted the pledge and declared the new West Africa Province, and Islamic State issued 10 videos celebrating Shekau’s pledge from “provinces” in Algeria, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Iraq.¹²⁹ AQIM did not issue a statement; it had by this time seen its former allies merge with Shekau and, even though they talked of respecting civilian lives, they still accepted JAS’s reign of terror. Al-Qaeda, for its part, in 2015 was coordinating a narrative strategy across all of its affiliates against Islamic State, with a focus on its *takfirism*—the same claim the GSPC had leveraged against the GIA and that Ansaru had leveraged against JAS. Prominent al-Qaeda supporters on jihadist forums regarded JAS’s turn to Islamic State in this regard as “insignificant,” as by now JAS was already lost from the al-Qaeda fold.¹³⁰

Ansaru, which disapproved of any alliance with Islamic State, was likely aware, although not part of, the ongoing discussions among JAS leading up to Shekau’s pledge to al-Baghdadi. For the first time, Ansaru issued a video condemning Shekau by name and mocking him, with a clip of Shekau scratching his crotch from the video where he claimed the November 2014 Grand Mosque bombing in Kano.¹³¹ Ansaru also showed a video claiming its first operation since 2013 at a military checkpoint in Bauchi State, reiterating its commitment to Usman dan Fodio’s legacy, and commiserating with civilians in the town of Mundu in Bauchi State, which Nigerian soldiers burnt to the ground after an attack.¹³² This could not, however, overcome the fact that Ansaru was in effect operationally irrelevant. Al-

Barnawi's arrest in April 2016 would only further weaken it, as did some members subsequently defecting to join the new West Africa Province.¹³³

Thus, in March 2015, the new West Africa Province was, at least nominally, united and under the banner of the Islamic State. But could Islamic State mediate between the two factions—Nur, Fatima, and al-Barnawi versus Shekau—or could it be bothered to? Would it even care about these internal dynamics once it could propagate that it had expanded to West Africa? The next section discusses how Islamic State's relatively hands-off approach to West Africa Province (compared to AQIM with Ansaru and JAS) and West Africa Province's own internal fissures led to a repetition of history.

The Caliphate in Crisis

After Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi, the new West Africa Province immediately came under unprecedented pressure. After a presidential election that brought to power former military ruler Muhammed Buhari in March 2015 and a State of Emergency military offensive in February 2015, Nigeria using Nigerian, Chadian, and Cameroonian forces and South African contractors drove West Africa Province out of most territories it held, causing it to lose *tamkin*. The al-Barnawi faction of West Africa Province—referring to those fighters formerly in Ansaru and the JAS AQIM faction and aligned with al-Barnawi, Nur and Fatima—consolidated its operations on Nigeria's borders with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. There it focused on raids and sporadic, often retaliatory, bombings in neighboring countries, including in N'djamena, the Chadian capital, for the first time in June 2015. The West Africa Province Shekau faction—referring to those fighters historically in the JAS Shekau faction—retreated into Borno State's Sambisa Forest, which it used as a base for attacks on military and civilian targets.

During this downturn for West Africa Province, the same internal factional issues that plagued relations between JAS and the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru played out again. The al-Barnawi faction could no longer co-exist with the Shekau faction and its proclivity for causing civilian deaths, which it believed would cause West Africa Province to lose local popular support, embolden the rise of civilian militias to oppose it, and contradict theological prohibitions against killing Muslim civilians. Shekau, for instance,

ordered a female suicide attack on an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp near Maiduguri, which killed nearly 100 people, justifying it on grounds that the Muslim IDPs were “apostates” for receiving services from an “un-Islamic” government, an attack that the al-Barnawi faction opposed.

In addition, the al-Barnawi faction accused Shekau of hoarding supplies while children were dying of starvation and killing militants without explanation who disagreed with him, including fighters and civilians whose only crime was holding a government ID card. Shekau also killed militants with key skill sets, such the lead bomb maker, for defecting to the al-Barnawi faction.¹³⁵ Al-Barnawi, in contrast, wanted his fighters to “booby-trap and blow up every church that [they] are able to reach, and kill all of those who [they] find from the citizens of the Cross,” including “Crusader relief organizations” that exploit “the displaced in the raging war, and provide them with food and shelter and then Christianize their children.”¹³⁶ However, al-Barnawi employed the Islamic theological tool of deferment, or *irja'*, to argue that ordinary Muslim civilians who did not *actively oppose* West Africa Province should not be judged as apostates.

Separately, Nur and Fatima accused Shekau of disregarding al-Baghdadi’s orders to distinguish between two categories of female “apostates”: first, Muslim women who participate in democracy, who could be given a pass based on the theological tool of *irja'*; and, second, “unbelievers,” such as the Christian Chibok girls, who could be kept as slaves. Shekau kept both groups as slaves and believed that the al-Barnawi faction, which controlled the communications to Islamic State and cut off his faction from communicating with Islamic State, was deceiving him about al-Baghdadi’s orders. The animosity became so great that Shekau refused to meet with the al-Barnawi faction because he believed Nur would place tracking devices at his hideouts that would cause him to be captured.¹³⁷

As a result of complaints of the al-Barnawi faction to Islamic State against Shekau, as well as the deaths of the North African Islamic State members who had favored Shekau and al-Barnawi’s continued control of West Africa Province’s communications with Islamic State, in early 2016 Islamic State began promoting West Africa Province operations in Niger that were carried out by the al-Barnawi faction. Then, in August 2016, Islamic State

announced that al-Barnawi would be the new *wali* of the West Africa Province.¹³⁸ At the end of the day, Islamic State saw Shekau as expendable: what it needed for its narrative purposes was to have a “province” in West Africa, even if that did not supply with it the same level of training and resources as AQIM had done for JAS and Ansaru. Even though Shekau was doctrinally closer to Islamic State than al-Barnawi was, Islamic State was willing to drop him—although perhaps it had little choice, as al-Barnawi ultimately controlled the lines of communications.

For Shekau, being dropped from the role of *wali* only liberated him to be independent, as he had always preferred. Shekau still maintained that al-Baghdadi was a legitimate caliph and maintained his claim to be leading *an* Islamic State in *a* West Africa Province, but he reverted to leading it under the brand of JAS, now in its second iteration. Shekau also blamed al-Barnawi for “cutting off” his communications with Islamic State and “creating divisions” that led to the breakup of *the* Islamic State’s West Africa Province and accused al-Barnawi of “polytheism” for “innovating” his own Sharia laws, such as *irja’*, instead of following Quran and *hadith* as per Shekau’s interpretation.¹³⁹

As a consequence of the breakup of West Africa Province and the creation of the second iteration of JAS, some militants in what had been the Shekau faction defected to the West Africa Province under al-Barnawi, including Shekau’s spokesman since 2013. He had been overseeing some of the Chibok girls. This allowed the first exchange for some Chibok schoolgirls to take place in October 2016, when 23 girls were released for an undisclosed sum of money.¹⁴⁰ Shekau, however, then ordered his fighters to kill his former spokesman, which they did before the end of 2016.¹⁴¹ Shekau nonetheless took advantage of the lines of communication with between members of his factions and the negotiators on the government side through the facilitation of the Swiss government and ICRC to make another separate deal in May 2017 in which 83 girls were exchanged for several high-level JAS prisoners (one girl, however, decide to stay with her JAS “husband” and thus did not leave the camp).

Nonetheless, the general parameters of the second iteration of JAS and West Africa Province roughly matched the same areas of operations as

before the split. JAS in its second iteration operated mostly around Sambisa Forest; and Shekau tried to break his isolation by reaching out to French-speaking fighters from around the Lake Chad region.¹⁴² West Africa Province operated mostly around the Borno State borderlands with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon and focused on targeting civilians who collaborated with the government.¹⁴³ Ansaru, meanwhile, continued in operational dormancy within Nigeria, despite al-Qaeda still recognizing it in a January 2017 publication.

Discussion Questions

1. How did the incorporation of kidnappings into JAS operations support its funding? How may this have also supported other aspects of the escalation of violence after the start of the kidnapping campaign?
2. Do the shifting alliances between both JAS factions and Ansaru appear to be for the short term or long term, influenced by external actors or internal dynamics, based on ideological or strategic concerns?
3. How is reviving lost empires a specific al-Qaeda narrative tool, and how did Ansaru and later JAS exploit such narratives? Given Shekau's local support base, could these narratives have had a negative effect on his recruitment? How can these types of narratives be combated in terms of government/civil society counter-narrative efforts?
4. In what way was Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi beneficial to JAS? In what ways was it beneficial to Islamic State? Does the fact that a pledge was made mean that the relationship between JAS or the new West Africa Province and Islamic State was deeper than al-Qaeda's relationship with the Nigerian Taliban, Ansaru, or JAS?
5. What are some of the reasons AQIM barely commented or offered an explanation to its supporters after Shekau's pledge to Islamic State or after the pledges of other small AQIM breakaway factions to Islamic State?
6. In what ways did the skill sets of the former JAS AQIM faction, Ansaru, and Mali-based militants from Mali complement the skill sets of the JAS Shekau faction? In what ways were their styles contradictory?
7. How did the holding of territory, or *tamkin*, prove to be a liability for West Africa Province (a) in terms of strategy and (b) in terms of leading to the issues that arose between its two factions about the treatment of civilians? In addition, how does al-Qaeda's gradual approach to establish-

- ing a caliphate make having *tamkin* less of a priority and provide certain strategic advantages for it over Islamic State?
8. Did West Africa Province's breakup into the al-Barnawi-led West Africa Province and the Shekau-led JAS in its second iteration represent a counterinsurgency success, or might it complicate counterinsurgency efforts? In what way could disagreements with Shekau over his targeting of civilians and even other co-militants be leveraged for counterinsurgent purposes?
 9. What was the impact of Operation Serval on Nigeria? Was Operation Serval a success at the tactical, operational, or strategic levels? What does this tell us about the second- and third-order effects of military interventions against armed groups?

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CONCLUSION: FUTURE SCENARIOS

As of spring 2017, the Islamic State is in the process of losing *tamkin* in its own heartland of Iraq and Syria. In late 2016, it also lost control of the territories it held in Libya that served as its base for coordinating West Africa Province and other new and prospective provinces in Africa. AQIM, meanwhile recovered from the losses it suffered in Operational Serval in January 2017 and announced a new group backed by al-Qaeda overall leadership called Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims).¹⁴⁴ This group brought together the ethnically Tuareg leader of Ansar Dine, Ag Ghaly, who is the overall leader of the new group; the ethnically Fulani Katiba Macina¹⁴⁵ leader Hamadou Kufa, who led MUJWA in the battle at Konna; the ethnically Algerian Arab leader of AQIM's Sahara Region, Yahia Abu al-Hamam; the ethnically Berber AQIM Islamic law judge Abou Abderrahman El; and the ethnically Malian Tangara (referring to the clan's Mauritanian ancestry) Arab Al-Hasan al-Ansari, who is the deputy leader of al-Mourabitun under Mokhtar Belmokhtar and cousin of a MUJWA founder. The multiple ethnicities of these leaders, their appeals to sub-Saharan African jihadist history, and their merging together under "one banner, one group, one emir [leader]" was a culmination of AQIM's southwards expansion and localization in Mali and sub-Saharan West Africa.

Moreover, the new group counters Islamic State's accusations against al-Qaeda of being under "multiple banners" (instead of *one* Islamic State) through its display of unity, while in its founding statement it also claimed the legacy, however contradictorily, of al-Zarqawi and, of course, bin Laden. Moreover, the videos of the AQIM Sahara Branch, which will likely carry over to the new group, have adopted Islamic State choreography and slogans, such as the promise to "conquer Rome [the West]," and AQIM more broadly has upgraded its social media output to rival the quality of Islamic State.¹⁴⁶ Much of this came as a response to Abu Iyad al-Tunisi's

letter, when AQIM realized that if it did not update its media and message it would risk losing many of its young fighters in North and West Africa to Islamic State.

Although AQIM does not control territory like it did in northern Mali before Operation Serval, it is carrying out attacks in Mali at its highest rates since 2012. In late 2015 and early 2016, AQIM in coordination with Ansar Dine and Katiba Macina also killed dozens of foreigners at international hotels in the capitals of Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire; Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; and Bamako, Mali. This showed AQIM's potential to expand in the region.¹⁴⁷ With AQIM strong (and Islamic State relatively weak) in West Africa, AQIM has repelled Islamic State expansion in the region and has even begun to actively try to "rehabilitate" Islamic State members who have retreated from the fighting in Libya or returned to North Africa from Syria, in order to facilitate their joining AQIM. Islamic State only has West Africa Province as part of its formal network in West Africa, but also maintains informal brigades comprised of some former MUJWA commanders elsewhere in the Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger border axis.

Given this context, with Nur and Fatima—former JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru members, respectively—now leading West Africa Province, could they return to the al-Qaeda fold? Would the new group, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, welcome them back? If al-Baghdadi was killed or Islamic State folded, would Nur and Fatima still view him as a legitimate caliph and stick with Islamic State? Would they prefer to be "independent," or link with Shekau again? Might they have been duped by Islamic State's own propaganda about the vitality of the caliphate and regret having joined once they see how quickly the caliphate folded, judging that al-Qaeda "gradual approach" is wiser? It would likely not be difficult to reconnect with AQIM if they chose to do so. How could West Africa Province's tactics change if it reconnected with AQIM?

Historically, the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru tried to create tensions between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt. Now in Mali, the new group—particularly via Hamadou Kufa's Katiba Macina—is backing ethnic Fulanis against ethnic Bambaras, who are perceived as being "less Islamic" than the Fulani.¹⁴⁸ Could West Africa Province re-establish its

presence in the Middle Belt, possibly by allying with remnant Ansaru members who are still there, and incite not only Muslim-Christian tensions but specifically Fulani tensions with Christians, portraying itself as the protector of Fulanis as well as Muslims? Could it do the same in Borno State and begin to more deeply embed itself in Kanuri communities? If so, would it need Shekau's help or need to pull fighters from JAS? Could either another unification or a further break in JAS lead to opportunities to negotiate for the Chibok girls?

Moreover, if Nur and Fatima and thereby also al-Barnawi rejoined AQIM, might AQIM compel them to release the Chibok girls and other slaves? If so, does this suggest that patience in negotiations over the Chibok girls may lead to their freedom and be a better long-term strategy than paying for their freedom? Finally, did the JAS AQIM faction and Ansaru rely too much on Salafi networks in recruitment and not enough on ethnic factors? These are all questions that analysts, scholars, and military officials should contemplate as they consider counter-“Boko Haram” strategies in West Africa—or, as this case study shows, should they not consider “counter-West Africa Province” and “counter-JAS” strategies?

Notes

144. Video announcement of the formation of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims) al-Zaleqa Media, March 2, 2017. See also Heni Nsaibia, “Jihadist Groups in the Sahel Region Formalize Merger,” *Jihadology Guest Post*, March 27, 2017, available at: <http://jihadology.net/2017/03/27/guest-post-jihadist-groups-in-the-sahel-region-formalize-merger/>.
145. Macina is a historic Fulani Islamic emirate of central Mali.
146. Jacob Zenn and Dario Cristiani, “AQIM's Resurgence: Responding to Islamic State,” *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 14, Issue 5, Jamestown Foundation, March 3, 2016, available at <https://jamestown.org/program/aqims-resurgence-responding-to-islamic-state/>.
147. “Burkina Faso, the Jihadist Threat Continuously Rising in the Far North—A New Ansar Dine Branch in Gestation, Ansaroul Islam,” *Menastream*, January 3, 2017, available at <http://menastream.com/burkina-faso-jihadist-threat-north/>.
148. Caleb Weiss, “Al Qaeda Entity Involved in Communal Violence in Central Mali,” *Long War Journal*, March 27, 2017, available at: <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/al-qaeda-entity-involved-in-communal-violence-in-central-mali.php>.

STUDY GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM THE TEXT

CHAPTER ONE

1. The Chibok kidnapping was JAS's most infamous operation. What factors enabled JAS to carry out this attack, and how significant is the operation in the context of JAS's rise and evolution?
2. At the time of this writing, more than 200 Chibok girls (and untold number of others) are still hostage to JAS and West Africa Province (they are believed to be divided among both groups), while the Nigerian government claims "Boko Haram" controls no more territory. Is this possible? What does the groups' ability to hold so many girls for so long say about their strength and operational security? Moreover, why might both groups be so patient, more than three years later?
3. How do the Islamic State and AQIM expansion models differ? To what extent do both groups prioritize ideology, narratives, tactics, and relationships? What challenges does a leader like Shekau pose for both groups?
4. Would JAS, West Africa Province, and Ansaru be best combated through the paradigm of an "anti-Boko Haram" strategy, or would distinguishing between groups be more effective? Why?
5. What were the key inflection points that caused the Nigerian Taliban to become JAS; Ansaru to split from JAS; JAS to become West Ansaru Province; and JAS (in its second iteration) to leave West Africa Province?
6. What significance do the names, or "branding," reflect for the Nigerian Taliban, JAS, Ansaru (and AQLBS before it), and West Africa Province? Are they just labels, or can they help determine the potential tactics, evolution, and recruitment strategies of groups? What about ISIS and Islamic State?
7. What enabled Shekau to survive so long as a leader? Has he been responsible for tactical innovations or alliances, or has he played a more passive role in those regards? If Shekau died, would it be a net positive, or could it lead fighters to join West Africa Province and end up strengthening it?

8. Was the rise of Nigerian Taliban into JAS, Ansaru, and West Africa Province inevitable? In particular, what role did reactions to al-Qaeda in 2001 by the U.S., to the Nigerian Taliban after 2004, and to the Nigerian Taliban after 2009 play? Why has the Nigerian military practice of violently crushing groups worked in the past but not with the Nigerian Taliban/JAS?
9. Understanding al-Qaeda strategies in its move towards Nigeria, such as economic warfare, overstressing U.S. forces, and furthering its own narratives as well as the desire of AQIM to increase its fund through kidnappings in Nigeria, how could the U.S. shape its approach to counterterrorism coordination with Nigeria? Moreover, how can al-Qaeda's challenges in expanding to Nigeria be used against it?
10. Based on AQIM's shift south since the early 1990s, how could Nigeria have prepared its eventual arrival in that country? What evidence or indicators should Nigeria have been looking at to pre-empt AQIM infiltration?
11. In the analytical lexicon, the word "affiliate" is used to describe groups in the al-Qaeda network. But the Nigerian Taliban, JAS (in its first iteration), and Ansaru were all in al-Qaeda's network but not formal affiliates, and their relationships with al-Qaeda were different. How could one best type these groups within the al-Qaeda network?
12. To what extent did al-Qaeda accelerate the rise of "Boko Haram"/Nigerian Taliban and its successors?

CHAPTER TWO

1. What explains AQIM's mixed support for the JAS Shekau faction attacks?
2. How may Shekau's belief that Muslims who participate in democracy are "apostates" on the same level as Christian "infidels" have led him to have a different targeting strategy and preferences than AQIM (recall the prior discussion on *takfirism* and the GIA)?
3. If Shekau's fighters were mostly Kanuris, how might this have affected the targeting strategy and areas of operations of his faction compared to the JAS AQIM faction, whose members were more likely to have

- traveled abroad after the July 2009 clashes and been from other Nigerian ethnicities?
4. How did the four attacks profiled above support the overall al-Qaeda strategy for Nigeria?
 5. To what extent were the much fewer suicide bombings in the AO of the JAS Shekau faction compared to the JAS AQIM faction related to differences in ideology or levels of training between the two factions?
 6. The words “terrorism” and “insurgency” have been used interchangeably, especially in the Nigerian context. To what extent would distinguishing between these terms—and the types of violence seen in 2012 in the areas of operations of the JAS Shekau faction and JAS AQIM faction—become relevant in develop a strategy to counter JAS?
 7. How do the different backgrounds of Khalid al-Barnawi and Shekau reflect their “near enemy” vs. “far enemy” approaches?
 8. What does AQIM’s relationship to both JAS factions and Ansaru suggest about the potential risks, or difficulties, in al-Qaeda’s expansion into Nigeria or any other country? What was the role of AQIM and other outside actors in the evolution of both JAS factions and Ansaru?
 9. Did the JAS Shekau faction, the JAS AQIM faction, or Ansaru pose the biggest threat? What metrics would one use to assess this? How does the answer depend on who is assessing the threat, such as the Nigerian government, an international NGO or company, or the U.S. government?

CHAPTER THREE

1. How did the incorporation of kidnappings into JAS operations support its funding? How may this have also supported other aspects of the escalation of violence after the start of the kidnapping campaign?
2. Do the shifting alliances between both JAS factions and Ansaru appear to be for the short term or long term, influenced by external actors or internal dynamics, based on ideological or strategic concerns?
3. How is reviving lost empires a specific al-Qaeda narrative tool, and how did Ansaru and later JAS exploit such narratives? Given Shekau’s local support base, could these narratives have had a negative effect on his recruitment? How can these types of narratives be combated in terms of government/civil society counter-narrative efforts?

4. In what way was Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi beneficial to JAS? In what ways was it beneficial to Islamic State? Does the fact that a pledge was made mean that the relationship between JAS or the new West Africa Province and Islamic State was deeper than al-Qaeda's relationship with the Nigerian Taliban, Ansaru, or JAS?
5. What are some of the reasons AQIM barely commented or offered an explanation to its supporters after Shekau's pledge to Islamic State or after the pledges of other small AQIM breakaway factions to Islamic State?
6. In what ways did the skill sets of the former JAS AQIM faction, Ansaru, and Mali-based militants from Mali complement the skill sets of the JAS Shekau faction? In what ways were their styles contradictory?
7. How did the holding of territory, or *tamkin*, prove to be a liability for West Africa Province (a) in terms of strategy and (b) in terms of leading to the issues that arose between its two factions about the treatment of civilians? In addition, how does al-Qaeda's gradual approach to establishing a caliphate make having *tamkin* less of a priority and provide certain strategic advantages for it over Islamic State?
8. Did West Africa Province's breakup into the al-Barnawi-led West Africa Province and the Shekau-led JAS in its second iteration represent a counterinsurgency success, or might it complicate counterinsurgency efforts? In what way could disagreements with Shekau over his targeting of civilians and even other co-militants be leveraged for counterinsurgent purposes?
9. What was the impact of Operation Serval on Nigeria? Was Operation Serval a success at the tactical, operational, or strategic levels? What does this tell us about the second- and third-order effects of military interventions against armed groups?

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacob Zenn is an adjunct assistant professor of the graduate level course “Violent Non-State Actors in World Politics” at Georgetown University’s Security Studies Program, and is a senior fellow on African and Eurasian affairs for the Jamestown Foundation in Washington, DC. He conducted fieldwork in Nigeria’s Borno State in 2015 and 2018, and in Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and several other states in Nigeria. This yielded a mapping of Boko Haram’s organizational structure for the Swiss embassy in Nigeria prior to negotiations in 2016 related to the Chibok schoolgirls’ kidnapping. Zenn holds a JD from Georgetown Law School, where he earned commendation as a Global Law Scholar.



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